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APOLOGY, &c.

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AN
A P O L O G Y
FOR PROFESSING THE
RELIGION OF NATURE,
IN
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OF
THE CHRISTIAN ÆRA;

ADDRESSED TO THE
Richard
RIGHT REVEREND DR. WATSON,
LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF. *R*

Κοινα των Ἀνθρώπων δικαία.

THUCID. L. iv.

L O N D O N:
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MDCCCLXXIX.

AN

APOLOGY

FOR THE

RELIGION OF NATURE

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OF

THE CHRISTIAN WORLD



WILLIAM WATSON

LONDON

Printed by J. Johnson, St. Paul's Church-Yard

1793

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APOLOGY, &c.

LETTER I.

MY LORD,

I DO not address your lordship with a view to polemic correspondence, for which I have no inclination or leisure; but in the hope of obtaining information on subjects distressing to my mind, and inconvenient to my circumstances.

The early years of my life, like those of your lordship's, were devoted to literature; as the source of fortune and fame. But a spirit of enquiry, which in you, has been held by the reins of interest; in me, has burst the boundaries of prudence;—and it has laid waste my expectations and hopes.

VOL. I.

B

That

That I do not believe in the articles and doctrines of the English church, or the authenticity of the revelation on which they are said to be founded, I am disposed to declare. And I wish to know why this declaration should excite resentment, and render me liable to disadvantages? I will not allege a suspicion generally entertained, that real and actual belief is not necessary to subscription, if the habit be induced early. But I should be highly grateful if I could be directed in the mode of subscribing to doubtful or unintelligible propositions, without destroying the peace of my mind. It has been hinted, that the extremes of credulity and incredulity meet; that atheists may appear to be of any opinion, or any sect, as interest or convenience may require; and that men of liberal minds are driven into atheism, to obtain that pliability of conscience so expedient in religious establishments. If this be true, I am not to hope it will be avowed; or if it were, it would not serve me.

Without

Without attempting to corroborate this opinion, from numerous cases in my own knowledge, I presume to address to the most decent defender of Christianity, my apology for not assenting to its pretensions, and for adhering to the religion of Nature.

I know this liberty will be deemed an offence; that declining the belief and *the advantages* of Christianity, is criminally denominated; and that infidel, and enemy, are synonymous terms in the language of bigotry.

of I trust the bishop of Landaff will despise such bigotry:—that he will listen with candor to the reasons which have determined me to decline powerful patronage, and to prefer anxious and laborious industry, to affluence procured by insincerity:—that he will concur with the efforts of philosophy to destroy the despotism of opinion; and to procure in religion, as in science, the unlimited power of choice.

That the state should support some religion, is a false principle, which I shall not at this time discuss. If it were true, why attempt it by a mode impracticable and impossible; which must nip integrity in the bud, and deprave the most valuable tendencies of the human mind? It is not possible to express a series of propositions to which the varying faculties of men can yield the same assent; and to offer recompence for belief, is the expedient of error and imposture. Every purpose of authority, every view of venality might be secured, without this *waste of intellectual delicacy*, and *prostitution of moral honor*.

If the articles of the church, and the doctrines of revelation cannot support their credit without the aid of mercenaries, why not render the conditions of their services practicable? It is practicable to yield any species of external obedience;—it is not possible to regulate by authority, the real assent of the mind. The clergy might be confined to modes, and articles of instruction, without being induced, by previous subscrip-

subscription, to destroy their hopes, or to violate their integrity.

It is said, the habit of subscribing, like that of custom-house oaths, leaves no vicious traces on the mind. If this were avowed, it would not relieve me; for I have not the habit. I subscribe a proposition, as I sign a bond; and I have no expedient to evade its meaning.

I am unwilling to ascribe this opinion to the most respectable scholars of the present clergy; and yet in their conversation and sermons, they are more the disciples of Xenophon and Seneca, than of Calvin or Cranmer, of Moses or of Jesus.

I have perused with attention your lordship's works; and have heard some of your public discourses. You profess yourself an English clergyman; but never allude to the doctrine of the English articles; and *prima facie*, I should adjudge you, and the majority of the holy bench, to be Arminian. And yet a conscientious Arminian cannot subscribe the thirty-nine articles.

If you would furnish me with the clue to develope these intricate inconsistencies, it would lead me further; it would enable a Theist to pass the ordeal without injury, and to preach morality under holy sanctions; with the holy privilege of appropriating to himself large portions of the fruits of industry.

The usage of antiquity in *esoteric* and *exoteric* doctrines was intelligible; and perfectly consistent with honour and integrity. Private opinions were adopted by choice; public usages from policy: but no oaths or declarations were extorted on the philosophic and moral truths of those usages; and obedience to the absurdities of public authority, was consistent with that delicacy of private honor which is the happiness of philosophic minds. In the modern method, of adding subscription to obedience, respecting the metaphysics of theology, I see no asylum for integrity, from the confines of Calvinism, to those of licentious and unprincipled Atheism.

This,

This, however, I offer only as an opinion; and it may be owing to the weakness of my visual organs: or there may be nostrums in religion as in medicine, to correct the impurities of moral habits. I know your predilection for a medical nostrum; it had some influence on my determination to take it: and though I would avoid the imputation of *the disease* for which it is celebrated, even in the pious recesses of an university; of the evils of which I have no experience: I am grateful for a portion of life it has rescued from an alarming and hopeless disorder. If you will point out to me *an intellectual syrup* of equal efficacy with the *vegetable of De Velnos*, I will risk the impurity of subscription; the evening of my life may pass in literary ease and satisfaction; and I will hail you to my last moment as my guide and benefactor.

If this be not practicable, let me interest your justice and humanity in discountenancing the rancor and malignity with which infidelity is treated.

And what are the pretences?

Have the doubts and arguments of unbelievers any tendency to unsettle, or change the opinions of the common people, who are the sheep of religious establishments, and whose fleeces are the objects of concern? Nothing can be more improbable; for the common people never read the productions of unbelievers.

Is it to be supposed that the zealots of religion are unwilling to enter the kingdom of Heaven, unless its glories and advantages *be participated* by converted infidels? This is not warranted by the spirit and language of religionists:—on the common principle of avarice, they seize the slightest pretences to exclude others from heaven; but it is attended with a species of malignity peculiar to religious minds: for it is in religion alone that malignity adds hatred to misfortune, and punishes men for declining high distinctions and everlasting pleasures.—I have been often accosted—

BIGOT.

Sir,—you have no religion!

AUTHOR.

AUTHOR.

In your sense of the word perhaps I have none.

BIGOT.

What not believe in revelation?

AUTHOR.

Suppose I do not?

BIGOT.

You will be damned eternally!

AUTHOR.

Do you imagine I can believe what appears to be an imposture?

BIGOT.

No.

AUTHOR.

And do you suppose there is a power in the universe that will condemn me to everlasting misery, for honestly obeying the dictates of my mind?

BIGOT.

Can you be honest and be an infidel?

AUTHOR.

There are no temptations to dishonesty in infidelity; there are many in all professions of faith.

BIGOT.

There is an almighty power which will condemn you for unbelief.

AUTHOR.

That power, I suppose, you call the devil.

BIGOT.

No—I call him God!

AUTHOR.

Call him what you please; his spirit must be that of malignity :--and I neither fear nor love him.

BIGOT.

Oh—you are an Atheist!

AUTHOR.

No holy falsehood, if you please :—you are much nearer Atheism than I am.

BIGOT.

I believe in God, Christ, the holy ghost, the scriptures, the articles of the church; and I am assured, in consequence, of everlasting life.

AUTHOR.

I wish you happy in the enjoyment of it.—I am not so fortunate in my belief and expectation.

BIGOT.

BIGOT.

I abhor you—and hope to see you punished.

AUTHOR.

Do you not think me sufficiently punished in the loss of Heaven; and of your company there?

BIGOT.

I would have you taste the torments of Hell here!

AUTHOR.

Why?—Will not the hope of my endless misery *gratify* you?—Besides, by my absence, there will be the more room for you in heaven.

BIGOT.

You talk profanely.

AUTHOR.

I talk intelligibly.

BIGOT.

You do not consider the immense rewards of religious faith.

AUTHOR.

I have considered them with the anxious impartiality. I have often considered

dered the beauty and value of your estate :
but those circumstances do not persuade
me it is mine ; nor do you seem solicitous
I should have that persuasion.

BIGOT.

No—that is another matter.

AUTHOR.

I think it exactly similar ; and I desire
you will divide your estate with me, for
believing it is mine.

BIGOT.

But you do not believe it.

AUTHOR.

And are you angry with me for not be-
lieving it ?

BIGOT.

No.

AUTHOR.

And why, for not believing in the pro-
mises of revelation ? They are not so dear
to you, I perceive, as your estate.

BIGOT.

You are mistaken.

AUTHOR.

When you explain why you will not di-
vide your property with me, on a profes-
sion

fion of belief—I will excuse your hatred for *declining to participate your estates* in heaven.

I thus, frequently, repel the fury of uncharitable zeal ; but the motives, properties, and ingredients, of spiritual malice, I never could satisfactorily analize ; and I recommend them to your penetration.

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

L E T T E R II.

MY LORD,

I WILL not detain you on the subjects of historic evidence and miraculous powers; they have been treated by writers of splendid abilities: and they have never been proposed with sufficient artifice to leave a doubt on my mind.

I have hesitated only on the expediency of penitence; on the consolations of revelation in old age; and on the hopes of immortality.

I will consider these subjects separately, and at large. If my mind should incline to a determination unfavorable to my interest, you may pity my supposed error; but you cannot treat me with passion and resentment. There may be numbers of inferior zealots who will eagerly discharge against me, the sanctified offices of rancor and calumny.

The common doctrine of penitence, implying recovery to a state of virtue, has
some

some foundation in nature. The advantage taken of sorrow and misery in the unfortunate, to extort confessions and atonements is, by some persons, referred to the authority of God ; by others, to that artifice which affords support, and is the source of riches and honors to a sacred profession.

Atonements to an almighty and indefinite being, are the genuine effects of superstition. It seems difficult to conceive they can be accepted ; as it must be impossible either to injure or offend him. Men are elevated above resentment as they improve in wisdom, and discern the causes of errors in those around them. Regret and pity are the emotions we feel ; and we are sometimes the more attached to an imperfect being, when errors are foils to its excellencies ; and when we are warmly actuated by compassion.

Men of virtuous and tender minds, are involved in inconveniences on these accounts. They rest their hopes of assisting those in error, on insufficient ground ;--not
from

from want of judgment, but from extreme humanity. Men of harsh and uncomplying dispositions, shun the faulty and unhappy ;—not from virtue, but from inhumanity. It is true, instances may be produced, where those who have associated with the unfortunate and criminal, have been seduced and corrupted. Precise and unfeeling persons point them out as warnings ; or more ungenerously as proofs, that those who associate with the vicious, are always vicious themselves.

In these, as in other cases, we may discern the fallacy of general maxims ; one of which is, ‘ a man may be known by his company.’ As it would be ridiculous to declare a man poor, because he is often in the habitations of poverty ; so it would be, that he is addicted to the vices of those with whom his humanity may lead to associate, for their assistance and recovery.

There are not many passions so fascinating as this species of generosity ; and it reconciles us to difficulties which would
be

be otherwise intolerable. It is flattering to relieve any distress : hence the charity we see commonly and readily practised. It is exquisitely pleasing to effect the recovery of amiable and excellent minds, involved in miseries from errors and vices.

In the present state of things, and in those measures it may render expedient, there is no moral doctrine of greater importance than that of penitence ; and it is necessary we should judge properly of its nature and foundation. The principles and customs of the societies in which we live are such, that we cannot escape perversion. Characters appearing perfect, are always fallacious ; and they offend the eye of penetration and taste, from, what an artist would call, want of truth and keeping. Their failings are either concealed, connived at, or licensed. This is the reason that generous minds are more inclined to be attached to sinners than to saints ; as the obscure and mean vices of a guarded character, are stronger indications

tions of fixed depravity, than the occasional deviations of lively and passionate dispositions.

The general business of the moralist is the boasted office of Jesus, 'not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'

The few persons who have had the happiness of a good education, leading, to real knowledge, constitutions justly organized and disposed; are not susceptible of any deviations which they cannot instantly rectify:—those apes of wisdom, who disgrace the denomination of philosophy; whose meagre stream of knowledge flows only at their mouths, and whose memories and hearts have no connection or sympathy; whose freedom consists in substituting one species of credulity for another; and whose cowardly virtues evaporate in secret wishes:—these, class themselves among the righteous;—and he must be a visionary, either in religion or morality, who would attempt to render them good
for

for any thing :—they are splendid weeds in their essential properties ; and a miracle only, can make them beautiful and useful plants.

Persons in the art and habit of sheltering meannesses or vices, under the veil of regularity and decorum ; and the great class of hypocrites or pretenders to perfection, are beyond the reach of any measures invented by human reason ; and the religion that would reform them, *would have supernatural claims*. They have served their time to a kind of mystery, and they will not relinquish its profits and advantages. It is with sinners, honest and acknowledged sinners, that we have hopes of success ; and it is here only, the efficacy of all doctrines respecting penitence and reformation, can be ascertained.

I must remove an objection to my phraseology, ‘ that I countenance iniquity, ‘ by declaring an unqualified preference ‘ of sinners, to saints.’ No proposition can be less doubtful than, ‘ when deceit ‘ is added to the incidental infirmities ‘ and

‘ and vices of human nature, the difficulties and dangers of our connections are doubled; and our disappointment and hatred multiplied.’ In the province of pleasure, those unhappy persons who are degraded by a licentious abuse of it, beneath any other condition of human beings—how do they obtain such treatment as to render their lives tolerable? By appearing to be what they are,—by being *honestly infamous*:—whereas those who cover their snares with the semblance of virtue, or wear a mask, to conceal their failings—seldom escape the detestation they deserve. In this, and every other case, plain and open sinners, are preferable to hypocrites; and *hypocrisy and sanctity*, in all my knowledge, and in my sincere opinion, are strictly and accurately synonymous.

The question before us, interesting to the pretensions of revelation is, how those who have erred and become vicious, may recover themselves and be reformed?

Reason

Reason owes it birth to the difference of things, agreeable and disagreeable ; and this difference extended to domestic, social, and national interests, forms the general doctrine of good and evil, on which depend the utility and importance of all rational pursuits. Our becoming behaviour, our happiness, and our hopes of recovery when perverted, rest wholly on ability to make the distinction with promptitude and accuracy.

The common standards of virtue and vice, are written doctrines and religious systems ; the civil laws of political constitutions ; and the customs and manners of nations.

In the difficulties occurring to me, either in the regulation of my own mind, or in the education of my family ; if either, or all these instruments could have effected my purposes, nothing short of idiotism could have excused the adoption of delicate, tedious, and painful processes. But I do not think it *even possible* to specify duties, in written doctrines ; and laws, customs, and

and manners, are arbitrary, contradictory, enigmatical, and obscure. By referring to such standards, men are in the condition of machines which compute time, not by organization and excellence of structure, but by the power of arbitrary and external instruments.

I have observed, young men who ordered their dispositions, by any rules out of themselves, never became virtuous; many of them fulfilled prescribed conditions, from selfishness or fear; and a species of satisfaction arose from it: but it seemed very different from the pleasure of those who rendered virtue the natural and spontaneous exercise of their powers. The former were never clear of some tincture of hypocrisy; and were always mercenary and selfish. When we take our measures from the will or command of another, or from specified precepts, customs, and laws, our care is to perform just what is necessary to approve our obedience, and secure our views. In this manner men may be religious, to the utmost degree required

required by any system, and not to be possessed of virtue ; or they may be loyal citizens, by the laws and customs of particular countries, without any degree of goodness. In all these cases, if we have transgressed, there are specified atonements ; and we practise the atonements as we do the duties. But the effect of atonements, is to confirm the disposition to offence ; sometimes to sink the mind irrecoverably into vice. For if we substitute the duty of atoning, for that of correcting the disorders occasioning deviation ; we render those disorders habitual and inveterate.

We acquire the power of distinguishing virtue and vice, as we do that of separating wholesome and unwholesome food. Superficial observers are astonished at the prevailing ignorance respecting morals ; and the abject servility with which men submit to the opinions and injunctions of priests. If we look into common life, observe how much at random men eat and drink, and under the least embarrassment have

have recourse to a physician, who may be called the priest of the body, and who is not of much greater utility than that of the soul; we shall not wonder they submit to direction in the more complicated, difficult, and important province of morals. If, in the interesting article of diet, we cannot exert so much reason, or avail ourselves of experience, to distinguish that food, which at the same time pleases the palate and is conducive to health; can it be matter of astonishment, in the numerous principles and dispositions which actuate our lives, that we should not always distinguish those which gratify passion, and lead to happiness? When we see common life cleared of physicians, and men generally competent to separate food from poison; we may look forward with hope that the moral world will be cleared of priests, and capable of instantaneous and certain determinations on the subject of virtue and vice.

The

The doctrine of nature may be simply and perspicuously stated by the allusion already used. As the man who, by reason and experience, readily discerns the productions which gratify, as well as nourish him, will be healthy; he, who can discern the dispositions and actions which give his passions the utmost exercise, while they promote the peace and satisfaction of his mind; will certainly be virtuous. On the other hand, as the man whose reason and experience have not taught him to distinguish salutary nutriment, and who is guided merely by his palate, will sink into disease and wretchedness; in the same manner, he who has not learnt to distinguish the actions which gratify appetite, while they lead to happiness, will have no guide but appetite; which on being gratified, may leave him to regret, and misery. This is the precise distinction made by reason, between the virtuous and the vicious. This must be discerned and understood by every man who would render his dispositions and conduct

the means of happiness; or would remedy any perversion and obliquity of his mind. I speak on the authority of nature; whose laws are invariable in the intellectual, as in the natural world: and which disowns all physicians or priests, either of body or mind. Every man must acquire this knowledge, and must be able, by the exercise of his own understanding, not that of another, to distinguish readily and accurately between virtue and vice. In that case, every thing in the moral world is possible; we may proceed satisfactorily in the road to happiness; or, if misled, we may recover it.

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your most obedient

And humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

LETTER III.

MY LORD,

THE common language of penitence is, ' I am so wretched in consequence of
 ' my faults, my own mind is so much a
 ' stranger to tranquility ; in the commis-
 ' sion and enjoyment of crimes it is so
 ' agitated with apprehension or sickened
 ' with disgust ; on discovery it is over-
 ' whelmed with shame ; and on reflection
 ' tortured with remorse ;—that vice is not
 ' worth the pursuit : nay, the balance of
 ' enjoyment must be against it.' This is
 the manner in which persons reason, who
 can reason at all. In general, men are
 terrified by the apprehension of penalties,
 into order or hypocrisy ; without acquiring
 virtuous principles, or tasting virtuous
 pleasures. This truth is exhibited in de-
 votees ; industrious in external ceremonies,
 or furious in zeal ; while their dispositions
 and tempers remain vicious and detesta-
 ble. They have been aptly denominated

‘ slips of grace, ingrafted on crab trees.’ The terrors of hell force them into devout exercises ; but in the intervals, depraved and malignant passions discover the principles of their minds. Ingenious men have therefore doubted, that genuine reformation *can be produced by fear of punishment*. As this is the motive to repentance, offered by revelation, and in use among its votaries ; it deserves our serious consideration.

The fear of punishment may certainly produce sorrow and penitence. Strong apprehensions of future evils, coinciding with present distress, may force men into a change of conduct ; and the satisfaction arising from the change, may induce them to persevere a sufficient time to prevent relapse. But this is barely within the verge of possibility. It has never occurred in my experience ; and that experience has been principally in favorable periods of life. Fear, in my knowledge, had only temporary effects : it produced a species of sorrow, and occasioned restraint;
but

but never influenced the inclination, or habit.

Without stating particular cases, we may take general arguments from three vices, incident to ill-educated youth; and which we may entwine as the poets do the graces—I mean, a disposition to falsehood; to obtain pleasure by intrigue; and property by stealth. These may be called sister deformities, in contrast to the graces; for they are the genuine offspring of the same parents.

Falsehood, intrigue, and a kind of dishonesty respecting property, very usual in young persons; have appeared to originate in the unjust restraints of poverty, or the injudicious authority of parents and instructors. The power of the laws over poverty, or of austere parents and tutors over children, may impress fear or terror; without materially affecting the vicious dispositions which are gratified by deceit. Their effect is similar to that of dramatic exhibitions; concerning which Aristotle spoke theoretically, when

he affirmed they purged the soul : if he meant by the operation any thing permanently beneficial. The first practices of youth, are the first efficient lessons of their education ; their first sufferings enure their minds to pain and punishment : and they gradually improve in fortitude or callousness, until their virtues or vices be established in habits. This may account for the risques they run without apprehension ; or the celerity with which they recover from circumstances of shame and humiliation.

It is commonly observed, the vices of lying, intrigue, and fraud, are incurable. I believe the observation owing to erroneous and incompetent remedies. We generally have recourse to power and terror, which are the sources of the evils ; and if they do not frighten a man out of the vice, and deprive him of the inclination and spirit to return, they blunt his sensibility, improve his artifice, and secure him in its practice.

Numerous

Numerous experiments of this nature have been made in my knowledge, and some with a view to impress conviction on me. They never succeeded. Severity and punishment increase that meanness which is the origin of deceit; induce greater caution in future attempts; and occasion improvements in the secret practice of vice. The best accounts I have ever had of patients treated in this manner, implied only the acquisition of decency in their deviations; the fear of pain or reproach, having given them caution and dexterity in the practice of vice.

You would find it difficult to produce cases of a different nature, among those who have entered the paths of dishonor, under the influence of love.

This passion, the first and best in human nature; the most pleasing and powerful incentive to virtue; which leads, almost irresistibly, to the great duties of life; spreads a charm around them beyond any thing ever imagined of enchantment; draws its lovely hand over the rough brow

of care ; and soothes the anguish of poverty, disappointment, and pain :—this is imprudently watched as an enemy, when first it gives signs of existence. It is a flame blown up by the breath of God ; and if any atrocious folly should be called impiety, it must be that of endeavouring to extinguish it. The conduct of parents, commonly deemed prudent, is on this occasion barbarous ; and being suggested by artifice, it naturally generates hypocrisy. To guard the virtue of a child, the ground is deserted on which alone it can rest—that of sincerity and truth. While all coarse appetites and insignificant passions are acknowledged, this is disowned ; and shame or dishonor are arbitrarily annexed to all its symptoms. As nature cannot be subdued, and parents are to be obeyed, children are forced into dissimulation. This is the case, particularly with women ; and it is the source of that artifice, that supreme dexterity in finessè, and that astonishing spirit of enterprize ; which, though

though calculated to parry or to revenge the abandoned profligacy of masculine customs ; subject them to the contempt, sometimes to the detestation, of those persons who are really disposed to confer happiness.

When a woman has formed connections promising happiness ; if in the habit of artifice and dissimulation, she will be easily drawn aside, and, at the hazard of her prospects, indulge trifling and temporary inclinations. The mind is accustomed to seize its pleasures by stealth, by artifice, by dissimulation ; it is a stranger to other means ; and has no idea of pleasures to be obtained in another manner. This perversion ; this life of ‘ hair-breadth ‘ ’scapes ;’ of pleasures suddenly snatched in perilous situations, and succeeded by temporary pains ; this concealed and stolen sensuality, which some sober people consider with astonishment, and think unaccountable ; is the natural and obvious effect of dissimulation, the first fruit of modern education.

It is owing to this error, that women of the best natural dispositions sacrifice peace of mind, the satisfaction and influence of a good name, and the power of diffusing happiness extensively around them; to fleeting and imperfect gratifications, attended with apprehension and terror; embittered with remorse, the loss of character, influence, and that power so flattering and so important which distinguishes the mothers of a happy family.

These truths are extremely interesting to those who discern them in time. If the evils be suffered to form habits, I know no remedies for them, natural or supernatural.

On the present occasion I speak of women, and not of men; because, in the latter, amorous infidelity arises from licentiousness. It is rather a depravity, than a vice; it ranks them with brutes, and not with perverted moral agents: and when accosted on the subject, they resent or ridicule a violation of their privileges. If it were stated to persons of this description,

tion, that the man who deceives another to obtain his property, is not to be degraded in infamy to a level with him who deceives a woman out of all her happiness; they would treat it with the contempt of an Indian who should be exhorted not to make exquisite soup of human skulls, or to regale and enjoy himself on the flesh and blood of his fellow creatures.

This is the character of a man of pleasure; whatever may be his appearance and manners. He is more savage, for he gives more pain; and occasions misery more complicated and exquisite than the wretches emerging from brutality, and who can only tear and devour the bodies of each other.

Such persons cannot be recovered. A debauché may run a short career, and sink, at an early period, into insignificance and domestic order; his appetites being palled, and his constitution irreparably injured. While his power of blessing, or his capacity of making happy, remains,

mains, he is occupied in diffusing misery; and when obliged to retire, and to wear the garb of decorum, he vents his spleen in satires on that part of the world he has offended. I have never seen any ground, in such a case, on which to rest a hope of recovery. It seems to me as practicable to elevate a Hottentot, confirmed in his habits, into the elegance and delicacy of enlightened society; as to raise a debauché into a man of honor, truth, feeling, conscience, or decency.

We shall find similar improbabilities of recovery or amendment, if we attentively observe those accustomed, in early life, to make free with little articles, the property of others. The shame or punishment of such transgressions, at an age when every thing is deemed venial, are only hints for caution and dexterity. Young persons, therefore, who have had habits of pilfering in infancy, generally continue through life to be dishonest in principle or inclination. The punishments of the laws, in some cases of this offence,

offence, are so inadequate and tremendous, that persons of only moderate resolution, are intimidated into caution, and forced within those bounds which admit of security.

This is the utmost effect of meer punishment, or the apprehension of punishment: for let the liar be tempted by advantage, and assured of secrecy; let the woman who, in love, has loosened those bands of honor and delicacy which encircle the human heart, be tempted by interest, flattery, or passion, and be secure; let the man who has depraved his opinions of justice by little acts of dishonesty, have opportunities of appropriating money which cannot be detected: each will obey the ruling and habitual inclination, without an idea of remorse.

In all religions, supposed to be supernatural, the operation of fear, is improved by an opinion that Almighty God fees and registers every thing for the purposes of reward and punishment. This would be the most useful doctrine of modern

dern establishments, if stated with humanity, and suffered to have its effect. But the Deity is usually characterised as an arbitrary relentless tyrant; and rewards and punishments are not invented with decent regard to probability. To counteract these absurdities, atonements are enjoined, rendering even credulity of little effect. The terrors of hell, as they are commonly used, lead the ignorant into forms and ceremonies, which are said to be charms against them: they may render a man superstitious, but cannot furnish him with virtuous principles, dispositions, or character.

Some moral use might have been made of the opinion that the Deity sees every thing; and those who are deterred from vicious actions only by shame, might have been influenced by the consideration, that secrecy respecting men, secured them only from slight dishonor; and that real infamy awaited them when called by God into a theatre occupied by an assembled world; and when a discovery of their cha-
racters

ractions would be made before superior beings. But hypocrites of every sort ; persons who have perverted into vicious but plausible habits, the principles of truth, pleasure, and honesty, are not to be affected by such considerations. The gross fear of a sanguinary tyrant, is barely sufficient to alarm them ; and this fear will either be rendered ineffectual by religious palliatives, or it will drive them to despair : effects equally unfriendly to all hopes of moral recovery.

I believe this account will bring to your recollection a general idea of the common doctrine of repentance ; or the usual means of amendment and reformation. I have no motive for questioning their excellence, but that arising from truth ; for my interest, reputation, and happiness are embarked in the success of measures, not in that of discussions on their nature : and the measures I pursue are known and public. Preference from prepossession would, in my case, be folly that would correct itself ; or put an end to

to my employment. Means, denominated supernatural, have, in all the cases to which I have attended, been ineffectual. The moral patients have been rendered cautious, orderly, decent, and even religious, in the common sense of the word; *but none have been truly reformed.*

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your most obedient

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

LETTER IV.

MY LORD,

AS it is easier to keep a garment unspotted, than to remedy the effects of negligence; as the body may with less skill be preserved in health, than recovered from disease: so the mind, when its powers are properly adjusted and employed, may proceed in the road of happiness with ease and delight; while it may be difficult, sometimes impossible, to recover it from habits of deviation, or perverted passions.

In this business, I have ever found it necessary to direct my attention to the faculty of distinguishing virtue and vice. It is called sensibility; and is apprehended to be given by nature. The construction or organization, on which the sensibility is formed, may be furnished by nature; but the degrees of truth, precision, and delicacy, with which we judge,
and

and determine, depend on art and education.

This sensibility, this sentiment of right and wrong, this conscience, may be so justly formed as to be the sure test of incidents and actions; or so negligently, and be so perverted as to be delusive: or, it may be restored, when considerably injured. Our attention therefore, should be directed to the power of distinguishing right and wrong. All sorrow, previous to the determination of this faculty, is the produce of disappointment, or of mortification at discovery; which has seldom any other effect than to render the offender cautious and artful in the commission of future offences.

It must be of great importance, that persons who would recover themselves, or rectify the dispositions of others, should distinguish sorrow forced by discovery, from genuine regret excited by a view of unworthy actions, and occasioned by clear discernment of the difference of good and evil.

An

An error, in this stage of the process, may be fatal. The effects of sorrow for an offence, are dislike of the principle leading to it; and resolution to renounce its influence. Sorrow for discovery, or excited by punishment, distress, and fear, may induce dislike of the principle, as the occasion of temporary distress; but will not prevent its adoption, when it offers secret pleasures or great convenience. This, however, is the passion enforced by supposed revelations, and denominated 'hatred of sin.' The real effects have ever, appeared to me, either in series of momentary and insignificant resolutions, atonements, prayers, and superstitious practices; or in despair of recovery, terminating in detestable habits. Penitents of this kind commonly consign their lives to the gratification of spurious and vitiated passions; for which they periodically atone, by specified and mechanical forms, gestures, and operations. This is adding to the inconveniences of vice, those of fictitious discipline; whose temporary

porary satisfaction cannot avail, and which generally produces fruitless torment.

Vicious passions are like springs; in an irregular and disordered state, they deform the hills that produce them. It is in vain we dam up the currents, when formed; all resistance misapplied, adds to their force and mischief: and no good can be done without approaching the source. In morals, when the mind becomes erroneous and vitiated; to alarm merely by the mischiefs it occasions, or by punishment and terror to impede and resist its progress, may only add to its impetuosity. To correct its deviations we must have address and resolution to approach their sources.

Without recurring to numerous cases, as authorities of my opinions; we may have instances to illustrate them, by a slight attention to the most prevalent and powerful of all passions.

The misery in which women are involved, who deviate from the path of virtue, is aggravated by many circumstances

stances of injustice; and the difficulties of their reformation are increased, by barbarous prejudices and customs. They have therefore been objects of compassion; and numerous plans have been imagined for their assistance and relief. These plans may have been suggested by humanity; and when I disapprove them, I hope it will not be imagined I would impeach their principle. The wanton cruelty with which women may be seduced, rendered the instruments of momentary gratification, and abandoned to infamy and misery, has been long the reproach of civil and religious institutions; and associations to palliate the evil, have been formed by humanity: but humanity, like any other affection, is liable to error. A general state of intelligence, admitting this brutal treatment of women, cannot be expected to devise or procure them proper relief.

In all cases, where real reformation is intended, we must comprehend the causes of the evil to be removed.

Women

Women are not generally sunk into infamy by poverty, idleness, and neglect of prayers and sermons. They are seduced by artifices, connived at by the laws; which will render ineffectual, any institutions to reform penitents in the paths of love. While we are at liberty to mislead women, by violations of faith and justice which, in the concerns of common property, would be capital offences;—while the injured have no hopes of redress, but from the honor and humanity of their seducers; while we are invited to licentiousness by institutions to shelter infamy—is not that infamy insured? is not misery multiplied by the means intended to relieve it?—or is it wonderful, when we have removed poverty, idleness, and irreligion, the evil should not be removed?

Here, I think, natural and supernatural means are brought into competition.

To reform persons sacrificed to love, measures of more delicacy and difficulty are required, than those adopted in public institutions.

Plans

Plans lately pursued for the reformation of the vicious, are copies of nunneries and convents; filled by persons actually imprisoned, or by those who fly the world, because they have not understanding and virtue to sustain its disappointments. But the intentions are different—the end of monastic vows being retirement, not reformation for future utility. We are not to wonder, those who have been confined in modern institutions, as the means of recovery, have disappointed the pious expectations of their benefactors; and that the time consumed in them, is only a respite for irregularity and vice.

Plans of recovery to social virtue, should be executed in *society*. Moral patients should be liable to temptations, but not under the necessity of submitting to them. Those who have fallen by artifice, should be instructed to guard against it; those who have been tempted by poverty, should be initiated in useful arts; and those having constitutional infirmities and habits of vice, should be taught to counteract them;
and

and to establish habits favourable to virtue. All institutions intended to affect principles and manners, should be *perfect communities, on small and accurate plans*; where a just police might be established; where the nature of virtue and vice might be exhibited, not in precepts and declarations, but in facts and occurrences; and where every member might be taught that moral calculation, which demonstrates our interest and our pleasure to be the result of order in our passions, and virtue in our manners.

If, instead of separating the sexes, the unfortunate devotees of love were mingled; if small communities were formed with suitable institutions; if the subjects of these little states might consider themselves as in nurseries for the general community, and be at liberty to discover their dispositions by the choice of employments or by forming connections—numerous benefits would arise; and every patient susceptible of recovery, would return into the world with dispositions he might

might retain. By separating the sexes, we form convents and nunneries; and not being inveloped by despair, they become nurseries of vice. The consequence of bringing together considerable numbers of the same sex, are too notorious to be disputed. Feeble projectors, and superficial legislators, are hastening into another extreme of absurdity, and enjoin *solitude*; *ever productive of incurable atrocity*. No person can be qualified for society, or instructed to avoid the errors and follies committed in it, but in institutions which are images of society. Posterity will therefore adjudge many of the charities; which do honor to our humanity, and are intended to serve the interests of virtue—as the supports of vice. It is astonishing this truth should not be obvious, while the effects of popular institutions are in the scale of the vice it is intended to correct. If the idle and profligate can look forward to an asylum, under the consequences of their faults; if they are crowded to produce depraved fermenta-

tion of body and mind ; if their hearts are deeply and fatally contaminated—it is not harsh to call these institutions, the temples of iniquity.

The doctrine of revelation, respecting repentance, is usually maintained on the propriety of opposing one passion to another : that of nature, by the necessity of suspending the operations of the mind in the pursuits of iniquity, until habits of a contrary tendency can be introduced. The credit of revelation, prevailing over that of reason, in prevailing customs ; the offices of reformation are consigned principally to fear. Hope of reward, and fear of punishment, are the substitutes of reason, sensibility, and conscience. And if their objects were at hand, they might sometimes effect the purposes of reformation : they might hold before the mind, images of such force as to deter it from crime ; and allow leisure to form habits of virtue. But these are not the great lessons of wisdom, in the recovery of misled or depraved minds. I have ever found them con-
fined

finer and partial, in their effects; they have weakened and debased the spirit, whose habits and actions they apparently reformed; and they furnished the artful, with occasions of complicated and perplexing imposture.

Virtue and happiness are the result of order and harmony in our affections: and they render us useful in all situations. The effect of hopes and fears may possibly be utility; but necessarily it is obedience. The distinction is extremely important to a virtuous character; and to the happiness of the human mind. The interest occasioned by the exercise of our reason and affections, is different from that which may be created by hopes of reward, and fears of punishment; whether specified by God or man:—the former lead the mind to virtue, by actual investigation and conviction of utility; the latter, to obedience, regularity, or superstition; and may leave it destitute of goodness.

Rewards and punishments may serve the purposes of government, in restraining excesses incident to society. The power of distinguishing right and wrong; of discerning utility and happiness; or of rectifying errors in sentiments and dispositions; are not susceptible of advantage from any species of religion hitherto exhibited with pretensions of being revealed: it is acquired in the manner of every other faculty; and it is possessed in proportion to our rank in the scale of intellectual existence.

Every being seems endowed with the power of discerning its path: and when driven out, has generally that of recovery. Man, far from being precluded the privilege, possesses it eminently; and in all moral cases, has hardly ever occasion to go out of himself, for information and assistance.

¶ Having the faculty of discerning real and permanent interests, the passions and habits of pursuing them, are in our power.

power. When vicious tendencies have perverted our manners, we may estimate their strength, and allot proper time for their correction. This, in all cases, is possible ; and generally practicable. We can abstain from pleasures the most exquisite, for a short time ; and if for any time, for ever. Vicious characters may therefore be reformed, without the miraculous aid of heaven ; if the dispositions be separated, and in every case sufficient time allotted for abstinence, resistance, and regulation. By resisting anger, a habit of mildness and patience may take place ; by repressing irregular passions, moderate love of pleasure may be cherished ; and every vice may be induced to yield to its opposite virtue.

The ancients practised this method of regulating their minds. They had periods of self-examination ; their dispositions were under the eye of reason ; and when they erred, it was the office

of reason, not of authority or passion, to
rectify them.

I am, my Lord,
Your obedient,
And very humble servant,
THE AUTHOR.

OLD AGE.

LETTER V.

*Habet senectutem, honorate præsertim, tantam auctoritatem,
ut ea pluris sit, quam omnes adolcentiæ voluptates.*

CIC. SENECT. S. 17.

MY LORD,

AMONG the inducements to adopt revelation, none are more frequently used, than the consolation and support furnished by it in old age. They have been repeatedly urged on me; and I so much respect the characters and principles from which they originate, that I shall consider the reasonable sources of pleasure in the decline of life. If those of revelation should deserve preference, I will readily adopt them.

Old age is a season to which all men direct their views. It is the common

policy of education to hold up its inconveniencies to youth; and to inforce principles which may alleviate or prevent them. I am not convinced of the utility of referring to the decline of life at this season; and when the subject has occurred in my own family, I have not stated the forms and observances of supernatural religion among the causes rendering it desirable.

There is a summary method of determining the sentiments with which we are to regard the approach of age.

It is said, 'The character of the Divine Being is supremely benevolent; all his appointments are good; and old age, being his appointment, must be a blessing.' But if it be admitted there are causes which, in indefinite instances, defeat such appointment, this species of piety will not be a sufficient support; and we may be as wretched on being deprived of happiness, as if we had no such opinion of providence.

We

We are obliged to take the operations of nature in detail ; and we can ascertain or comprehend only a small number of facts on any subject. The government of the world, in its general departments, offers to the human mind objects too large, too indefinite ; and attempts to reconcile good and evil in it, even by able philosophers, have generally been ridiculous.

If, in the constitution of this government, it be intended that old age shall be respectable and happy, where are the provisions to render the decay and decomposition of the human body insensible or pleasing ? Why is the loss of bodily strength, or mental ability, attended with contempt ? Why is old age generally deemed a misfortune ? And why should laws and customs be deliberately instituted to put old people to death ? In every situation, of which we have any knowledge, the duty, or virtue, has a reward or prize. The perplexing circumstance is, that rewards of this kind should be obtained

so precariously, and with so much difficulty, as to render any intention in nature questionable. It is probable, no moral happiness could be produced without this difficulty or uncertainty. We should have little satisfaction in virtue, without experience or knowledge of the vice to which it is opposed : and wisdom would not be an object of admiration ; the advantage and happiness attending it would not be perceived ; without being contrasted with folly. Public prudence, and public virtue, are the result of all possible experiments in imprudence and vice. The dispositions of nature consist of aptitudes, fitnesses, or affinities, which we are to discover, put together, or combine ; and we generally try every wrong method, before we adjust our determination and interest. Hence the introduction, nay, the utility and necessity of evil in the administration of the world ; and hence the variety and opposition of principles and customs

customs established under general pretensions of public happiness.

We are obliged to consider old age as approaching us under various circumstances ; some of which may render it pleasing, others unpleasing : and these circumstances are independent of extraneous and arbitrary principles, whether denominated human or divine.

In societies subsisting on depredation, where bodily strength and agility are the circumstances of importance, men become useless and burthensome in the decline of life. Such communities cannot admit the full exercise of the best affections. Children will not regard their parents with gratitude, as the causes of existence they do not find a blessing. Hardly any reciprocal offices take place to bind the young to the aged. When the savage hord is meditating mischievous expeditions, the strength and agility of those advancing to the decline of life, are tried ; they are made to climb trees, or to get

on their branches, which are shaken with violence; every wretch who falls is unfit for the expedition, useless to the community, and put to death.

In other cases they have not recourse to this species of trial, but determine summarily, on the fate of those who are evidently unable to accompany them.

These proceedings, however shocking to our feelings, seem to be consequences of particular situations. Tribes, who cannot provide fixed and convenient habitations, by the ordinary exertion of policy and strength, and who may be unable to support or convey aged persons on hazardous expeditions, are reduced to the necessity of suppressing affectionate suggestions which would arise in better situations; or rather, to substitute one kind of tenderness for another. Confining them to famine, to the fury of their enemies, or to be torn by wild beasts, is cruelty; and humanity, in their morals, is putting them to death.

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The infirmities of age, and the diseases and miseries attending it, in rude and ill-contrived communities, are reasons for committing this violence; or shewing this species of humanity.

In these situations, what doctrines, natural or supernatural, can render old age a blessing; if old age were permitted to take place? The persuasion of the community must be, that it is an evil; and the philosophy of the people consist in reconciling their minds to a violent prevention. This philosophy has not operated in reconciling the aged to death. We find, in all cases, the act is committed by the young:—it would be less offensive to nature; it would assume the appearance of moral merit if inflicted by themselves; if their death were in compliance with an established law, and on the deliberate conviction of inutility. The considerations which suppress all appearances of regret or indignation at the determination to destroy them, would highly gratify a philosophic mind. We
do

do not find such determinations produce repinings or resistance. We must imagine death, not attended with dishonor : and that the same minds which suggest sufficient reasons for their own support under excruciating pains ; which can apparently disregard torture ; and even provoke and stimulate the malignity of executioners ; have some mode of placing the sacrifice of old men in a light inducing acquiescence. I use the word acquiescence, because, if the sentiments of nature could be completely suppressed, by custom or necessity, and men be fully satisfied with such situations ; no efforts would be made to exchange them for others, where life may be extended in security to its utmost verge, and where talents suited to all its seasons may be exercised.

Slightly, as we may imagine, the affections to be excited in rude societies ; it must be impossible men should be propagated, children and youth brought up, live contiguously, observe the same customs,

toms, and co-operate in necessary or mischievous expeditions;—without social affections. Little as we may suppose the benefit of life or education in such cases—is it imaginable, a son can approach without emotion, a father and a mother, to do the terrible office of necessary humanity, by plunging his javelin in their bosoms? Can it be supposed a man, who has received kindness in difficulty; has been saved from the fury of an enemy, or from the fangs of a wild beast, by the interposition of an older and more experienced neighbor; would do the last office of violence on him, without anguish? For these duties, being necessary acts of humanity, devolve on children or friends; as being most interested in their execution. Persons slightly connected with the aged, would have only slight apprehensions concerning their fate: and leave them to its chance with indifference. Tenderness and affection feel these apprehensions in their utmost force; and the best children, or the best friends, may possibly be the
most

most ready and impetuous to discharge the horrible duty.

The voice of nature is here heard in awful dissonance. A child presenting himself to his parent; a friend to his friend; for this shocking, but compassionate office—are situations beyond the power of eloquent description. And the distress and misery; we may suppose the reasons, that savages have made efforts to form settled societies, and to invent the rude principles of policy.

In improved circumstances, old people are preserved; because their preservation is consistent with the security and interest of the state. Where contrivance, prudence, and wisdom, are associated with strength; and the society has a fixed residence, old persons are respected; in the councils and deliberations of settled tribes, old men hold the first ranks, and are deemed of great importance. Reason appears in its dawn; and, though shining through a misty and offensive atmosphere, it promises a splendid and glorious day.

Designs

Designs formed on the first suggestions of nature, are rudely sketched; but though executed with absurdity and folly, they bear the marks of their origin. Political constitutions, in nations barely settled, are on plans so natural and simple; so well calculated for the general interest, and the enjoyment of personal happiness, that writers of lively imaginations have rendered it problematical, whether the life of a savage be not preferable to that of a citizen in any civilized state. The outlines of all the boasted constitutions existing, are taken from plans conceived in woods: and it is supposed, pretended improvements are owing to error and artifice, rather than wisdom or public virtue.

In these circumstances, the seasons of human life, and the duties arising from them, are barely but distinctly marked. The old man takes his place, in the rank pointed out by his utility. Strength and agility being exhausted; and youth having furnished experience; he contrives
measures

measures he has not force to execute; controls the ardor of youthful imaginations; remedies the effects of passionate indiscretions; adjudges the rewards of valor and virtue; and directs the springs which actuate the state.

Here age assumes a venerable and pleasing aspect: and if its duties were confined within the limits of its country, but little disgust would mingle with serene and real pleasures. I mean, the internal regulations of savage communities, with so much civil policy as to produce public order, and so much knowledge of necessary arts, as to procure the means of subsistence; are so calculated for general happiness, that old men, as legislators and magistrates, would be in situations most respectable and pleasing, if states were not in wretched barbarism respecting each other; actuated by depraved passions, and avowing motives of cruelty and devastation, to which the human heart, in cool and deliberate moments, can never be reconciled. The minds of youth, are seas agitated by storms,
 where

where mischiefs and misfortunes make slight or transient impressions ; but those of old men are calm ; and violent or cruel passions cannot constitute their pleasure. They may preside in assemblies where enemies are tortured ; they may direct the hand of infancy to deeds of inhumanity : these are effects of policy, aided by habits of vindictiveness in circumstances of peril and desperation.

In communities thus constructed, old men enjoy the reward of their virtues, by being advanced to situations, where experience and wisdom are of public utility. Old age, therefore, is so far from requiring supernatural assistances ; so far from being disagreeable or undesirable, that it seems to be a calm and delightful season. The tumultuous ardor of great passions, is exhausted in tumultuous gratification ; the intense heats of a splendid day have subsided : and calm evening succeeds, more favorable to reflection and contemplation ; the principal ministers of human happiness. It is in the recollec-
tion

tion of moral actions, and not always in the performance, that we perceive their value. Hence the general disposition of age to refer to past transactions; to avoid present circumstances; to resist present impressions; and to live by reflection.

This condition of human societies, as it is favourable to the internal happiness of particular states, is strictly just to the rights of age. Old men take the rank assigned by the public interest; they preside in the councils of the community they had served in youth; and they foster, regulate, and reward in their offspring, those passions and virtues they have experienced and exercised. It is the spirit, actuating petty states towards each other, that prevents them from being happy; and allotting to the orders composing them, their respective duties and pleasures. Old age, occupying the seats of wisdom, and administering the rewards of virtue, need not solicit heaven to supply its satisfactions: it is useful and desirable, as the autumn of a fruitful year.

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The public passions being perfidious, vindictive, and cruel; all happiness is tainted; and the pleasures of age suffer mortifying diminutions.

Evils of this kind are not meliorated by superstition; or by the fables of any mythology. They force men to vary and improve the construction of societies: and if we trace their progressions, we shall find that the support and satisfaction of old age, are founded on the *actions*, not the *opinions*, of early life.

I am, My Lord,
Your obedient,
And most humble servant,
THE AUTHOR.

O L D A G E.

L E T T E R VI.

Aptissima omnino sunt, Scipio & Læli, arma senectutis, artes, exercitationesque virtutem: quæ in omni ætate cultæ, cum multum diuque vixeris, mirificos efferunt fructus; non solum quia numquam deferunt, ne in extremo quidem tempore ætatis (quamquam id maximum est) verum etiam quia conscientia bene actæ vitæ, multorum benefactorum recordatio jucundissima est.

CIC. DE SENECT. S. 3.

MY LORD,

I HAVE considered the principal circumstances, affecting old age, in savage communities. Events producing distinctions of rank, are obvious in the histories of Greece and Rome. Old men were honored; advanced in councils; and influenced senates, in proportion to the wisdom and excellence of political and civil institutions. The governments of Greece and Rome, produced morals of a pure
and

and exalted species; and the rewards of wisdom and virtue were allotted in age, by their prudent and equitable arrangements.

In the incidents producing the present condition of Europe, the progress of knowledge and civilization has not been gradual. Nations of great simplicity in manners and policy, invaded the dominions of enervated neighbors; to revenge injuries, or to improve their condition. To secure dominions suddenly acquired, they exchanged simple and equitable arrangements, for complicated systems, denominated feudal; plausible at their institution, but the sources of enormous calamities. The military spirit predominated; and occasioned the excesses which ever follow the dominion of violence and force. By the vices of these institutions, the states of Europe sunk into a condition of barbarism and wretchedness, more deplorable than that of savages approaching nearest to brutes, and whose miseries have hardly forced them
within

within the faint outlines of civil policy. The period denominated, the middle age, when the principles of Gothic systems were exhibited in their utmost malignity, involved men in calamities more complicated and deplorable, than could be experienced by savages, supposed to be destitute of civil government. For they blended the ferocity of brutal manners, with some knowledge of the military art, and of the discipline of the conquered states.

In these periods, old age partook largely of the general miseries. The perpetual clangor of arms, is very unsuitable to the quietness and peace so necessary in the decline of life; and the scenes of devastation and horror continually exhibited, kept the minds, of the weak and infirm, in alarming anxiety. The necessity of personal strength and valor, not only to acquire fame and glory, but to obtain security in the common intercourses of a violent life, drew the general attention to those qualities; and age sunk into oblivion under its infirmities and pains. The
recol-

recollection of years, spent in sanguinary actions, was not calculated for satisfaction; if not occasionally chequered with those beneficent exploits, by which female innocence was protected, or female honor avenged. Here supernatural assistances should have displayed their force; for they were acknowledged with implicit credulity. Superstition amused the leisure of wretched infirmity; but did not afford it consolation and support. Romances, the best records of those times, point out age as the season of regret. The aged, having lost the qualities, contributing to general interest and utility, mourned their insignificance, and pined in discontent.

If they reserved sufficient strength for atonements, by specified rites and stipulated sacrifices of property, religion became the active and powerful instrument of villainy; *for all religious atonements, are indirectly the motives of vice.*

The political regulations prevailing in Europe, when the northern nations took possession of it, have had effects on go-

vernments and morals, which may never be removed. Military honors, and the civil duties required, were annexed to the possession of property : and the possessor of a certain estate, whatever his age, capacity, or disposition, appeared in the first order of military leaders, or sustained an important part in national deliberations and councils. This introduced into the science of government, principles the most absurd and injurious. It rendered property the substitute of public talents ; enslaved wisdom to folly, and virtue to vice. The fatal effects of these principles, are observable in all the councils and measures of modern states. Where democratic turbulence has burst the bounds of oppression, a species of compromise has taken place, and motley bodies have been formed, of old men and boys : the duties of action and deliberation are not properly separated ; while youth is throwing out its crude thoughts in assemblies, improperly called *Senates* ; age is wielding the public sword with feeble and trembling hands.

These

These are among the inveterate and innumerable evils introduced by the regulations of foedal systems.

But though the privileges and blessings of age be not so considerable ; though the enthusiasm of its reflected pleasure be not so noble, as in situations to advise and direct the general prosperity ; in the wide field of enjoyment, which high civilization procures, many of the rights of wisdom and virtue may be introduced.

Here we must consider the condition of old people, as connected with individuals, or with private families. So small a portion of their satisfaction arises from public causes, that it hardly deserves an estimate. But the liberty of cultivating private and domestic virtues is so great, that we deplore not the loss of other privileges ; unless awakened into recollection by public danger or distress.

Old men, in our families and acquaintance, perform the duties which should be assigned them in the states : they give counsel ; check the imprudence, or direct the

passions of youth : and the respect and happiness they enjoy, are in proportion to the wisdom they have acquired, or to the activity and extent of their virtues. The prospect of age, therefore, has no circumstances, to be held out, as objects of terror. In age, as in every period, the use of reason, and the duties of goodness alone, can secure happiness. This truth is taught in all societies ; and is to be deduced from the lessons of nature. If we neglect it, we must take the consequences : for in the moral world, we can eat only of those fruits we have planted.

The objections to age are,

It deprives us of bodily activity and strength ; and suppresses passions and faculties, the sources of enjoyment.

The infirmities and diseases incident to it, embitter those losses :

And it holds before us, the near prospect of death.

In gradually depriving us of bodily force, abating the power of our faculties, or the ardor of our passions, it has the effect

effect of autumn and winter ; that of contrast to the fervor of an active summer. It is in life, as in the year :—if we understand the seasons, and properly use them, we enjoy their succession ; if not, we perpetually regret their changes : in summer wishing for winter, and in winter for summer. They who know not the use of seasons in life, are tormented with desires to quit present situations, whether of youth or age.

Geographers observe, by the form and motion of the globe, all its inhabitants have nearly equal quantities of light and heat. All situations and periods of life, are susceptible of nearly equal enjoyment. Poverty and riches, power and subjection, youth and age, differ rather in the nature, than in the quantity of their pleasures and pains. It is unphilosophical, unjust, and imprudent, to consign this life to youth, and to *refer age to another* for support and consolation. Youth and age are placed at opposite extremities of the same scene ; and advantageously influence each other

This influence is destroyed, by turning the views, and directing the desires of the aged to futurity.

Without aid from superstition, if it were capable of affording aid; without reference to another and uncertain state—the advantages of age may bear comparison with those of youth. A state of reflection, provided we have done well, may be as favorable to enjoyment, as the hurry of action. The sportsman, retired to his hall, and recording the incidents of the chase, feels a pleasure as great as when engaged in producing them. An old man, reflecting on virtuous actions; free from the agitations of uncertainty, hope, and the numerous passions attending actual engagements; is in a state of mind, not to be despised by youth.

The connections of friendship continue to the extremity of life. And the impressions of love, of conjugal and domestic affections; only vary their effects, without losing their value. If we could accurately state the moments of felicity,
 enjoyed

enjoyed by a happy bride; and those of a virtuous grandmother, doating on the offspring of beloved children; referring their features, motions, and actions, to those whom death has sanctified to her memory; tracing by their means the interesting circumstances of past life; and reviving all its valuable emotions with pure and calm voluptuousness:—if we could render such calculations accurate, would youth be insultingly preferred to age? We should not fear the approach of a period, replete with satisfaction and enjoyment.

You will observe, I state these advantages, on the supposition that we lead useful lives. *There is no art discovered by heaven or earth, to render age happy, if it succeed an idle, useless, or mischievous life. Age is like winter; and we are sustained by provisions made in spring, in summer, or in autumn. When by natural philosophy we produce bread, without attention to seed or harvest; we have some chance, by moral philosophy,*

or by religion, to furnish happiness at the conclusion of life, though we have trifled or misused its early and active seasons.

But it is said, ‘ at all events, the infirmities and disorders of age, are evils to be dreaded, as considerable abatements of happiness.’ In this case, men judge by appearance, and not by knowledge. It is true, years render us infirm; but enjoyments arising from recollection, this circumstance can have no great effect. We are gradually disposed to that quietness and rest, so favourable to reflected pleasures. It is by misusing youth, that age is consigned to painful infirmities. A beautiful woman, who has confined her thoughts to personal charms, must dread their loss; having no other means of enjoyment. Men, who have cultivated only insignificant or pernicious talents, dread the approach of a period, which may destroy their imagined utility. We observe multitudes of such characters, anxiously struggling against the approaches of age; studiously

studiously concealing its appearances; and earnestly wishing the return of youth.

As to disorders, age is not so liable to them as youth; nor does it suffer so much under them. Death is not a certain event at any period; and it is divested of terror to a virtuous man, in the calm moments of reflection, to which age is favorable.

But this leads to the limits of life; which I may venture to pass in another Letter.

I am, my Lord,

Your most obedient

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

D E A T H.

L E T T E R VII.

Nam habet natura, ut aliarum omnium rerum, sic vivendi modum,

CIC. DE SENECT. Sect. 23.

MY LORD,

DEATH, as the period of existence, is an object of disinclination; and artifices to accumulate its terrors have been numerous, as the advantages to be obtained by their abatement, or removal. These artifices have given importance, and sanctity to opinions, which may be groundless, mischievous, or detestable. A good understanding, directed into useful and proper enquiries, may discard the opinions, or exchange them: but no improvement in understanding, no length of time, will erase impressions made

made on the mind by false apprehensions, and those strong and terrific passions excited by false opinions. This is the reason, pre-possessions of infancy and youth recur in age; and that notwithstanding our improvements, when the powers of reflection decay, when we return into a second infancy, and are susceptible only of the direct sensations which influenced early years; the ideas first accompanying them may recur, and a philosopher may die as superstitiously as a monk. This is among the innumerable evils of prepossessing the mind with opinions, before it has the capacity of forming them. It prevents the fruits of future enquiries and future improvements; dishonors the evenings of useful and glorious lives; and furnishes impostors with plausible pretences for perpetuating the injuries of superstition.

I am so sensible of these inconveniences, and of the uses made of them to support lucrative opinions, that I may take another occasion to direct your par-

ticular attention to them; consider the arguments they are supposed to furnish; and impart the precautions I mean to take, either to prevent the evil in my own case, or to obviate the reflections on truth and freedom, which may possibly be made, even on my account.

At this time, I must confess, while I attempt to lead you in mere contemplation to the vale of death, I feel the power of associated ideas: my imagination is more disposed to shade it with heavy clouds; to break it into terrific scenes; and to people it with forms, annexed to my apprehensions by the fables and tales of infancy—than to represent it, as exhibited by reason and philosophy, in the mature and perfect use of my powers. Sensible of this inconvenience, I cannot be without apprehensions from public prejudices.

Your Lordship will hear me with the more patience, if you recollect, that every motive of interest is on the side of popular opinions; and that I must relinquish
them

them with regret. Superficial observers imagine, popular opinions may be opposed from vanity, or the affectation of singularity. It is not probable, any serious or permanent efforts can be made on such principles : no man will steadily and uniformly dispute propositions he believes to be true, without proposing some benefit or advantage : and when a certain loss in all lucrative concerns, added to general reproach and general odium, are the effects of unpopular tenets ; no person will inconsiderately adopt them, from whose abilities any thing can be apprehended.

Death has been studied with every possible view of interest ; and human imagination cannot invent an additional circumstance to enhance its advantages. All profitable errors in regard to it are fully sanctified ; and truth alone is heretical, and disadvantageous. It is so disadvantageous, that hardly any man, who has an interest, or an acquaintance to risque, will dare to utter his thoughts on the subject.

ject. I love truth: I love the esteem. I know I shall obtain for publicly declaring my thoughts; and making that declaration, in all possible cases, on the utmost line of liberty;—beyond every gratification I can derive from the world.—This is the important spring of my mind, if any thing in it be important; and though it be not the only motive of my conduct, it will furnish a reason, or justification, to those whose anger I incur, and whose misrepresentations I sustain, from the apprehension that I may speak or write, whatever I suppose to be truth.

That the termination of life, is in the general plan of nature, seems as clear and indisputable, as that we are born according to the operation of natural laws: and that every man will live his appointed time, is a principle of philosophy, as well as a doctrine of religion. But it may be expedient to explain it, in order to promote the interests of candor and humanity: as it has been perverted to serve those of cruel and lucrative superstitions.

When

When I affirm, the life of man has a period appointed by nature, I mean that the operation of natural and moral causes are such as to define his existence to a moment; exactly as they define his birth. And I think the position important; as it may relieve the mind of those apprehensions, arising from an opinion, that life is a benefit, given in trust by a tyrant; who has numbered its days for his own information; and to whom we are accountable for those we have ignorantly, or impatiently curtailed. Nature abhors this doctrine in all its forms and consequences. The life of man is like the current of a river, or any effect of general laws. Such is the wisdom, and as language has no better term, I will call it the goodness of God, that these effects are, in general, occasions of enjoyment. But exceptions, at least in appearance, exhibit human lives, and currents of water, in disadvantageous, inconvenient, and mischievous situations. To say, that God will require an account of this arrangement; or that
wretches

wretches will be punished for being wretches, by such arrangement; or for being forced by miseries out of existence; is folly at least: it is affirming, a stream should be condemned, for being forced out of any mischievous direction into the general element.

Observe, my Lord, I am speaking of Nature, and of that ineffable principle which actuates it; of whose ways I always think with diffidence, because I feel my inability to comprehend them; but whose wisdom I see clearly, when I see at all. To investigate the dispositions and relations which Nature has appointed, is my whole employment; and to conform to them, my happiness. This is all I know; or, perhaps, can know on the subject. Shall I have the impious presumption—shall I bear to see others have the impious presumption to personify this unsearchable and adorable principle; not only in the human form, but in that of a tyrant; in a character more execrable than any species of villainy has exhibited:

for

for no despot has ordained punishments for *suffering* under laws of his own appointment.

This must be the result of all superstitious determinations concerning human life. It is an undeniable principle of religion, as well as of philosophy, that the period, like the commencement of life, is in the general series of causes and effects; and yet the Being supposed to appoint them, is to punish those who submit necessarily to their influence and power. You will observe, though I endeavor to establish a general position, that we are incapable of crime or merit before God, in any manner analogous to our mutual offences and merits; I do not direct my observations against the clear and useful foundations of virtue. There are provisions and capabilities in Nature, for the formation of happy societies, which we are to investigate. If we discover them, we obtain the reward; if we do not, the benefit does not accrue: we sink into the general mass, and are revolved by laws, whose purposes we cannot comprehend.

prehend. In political societies, we constitute virtues and vices ; sometimes on designs, producing happiness, sometimes on those producing misery. In these situations, the magistrate, or the supreme power, considers lives as property ; and it may be an offence against his interest to render them inconvenient, insecure, or to take them away. Hence, the laws against threatening, endangering, or taking away a man's life ; and against suicide, or self-murder.—Considering societies in the general plan of Nature ; and the lives of men, necessary to the constitution of societies ; the loss and destruction of men may be an offence against Nature. But this material distinction should be made, that Nature has nothing analogous to retribution and revenge ; and that in civil societies, we are punished for crimes, to furnish moral motives to avoid them.

The authors of laws and inventors of constitutions, not having better means of preventing evils than punishments ; multiplied their terrors, by referring their
com-

completion to fiends and devils in future worlds. In general, it has been a sufficient misfortune, to be modelled in errors, to be driven into vices, and to suffer the miseries incident to them, by the folly of governments, or of those terrestrial fiends who have administered them: and he must be a malignant spirit, who could seriously imagine it a mortal sin, not to preserve and value life, when only a series of unpleasant sensations; that, because it may be useful to a tyrant, the wretched must endure it to the utmost extremity, or be committed to eternal flames.

Here we have the key to hell. The apprehension of eternal tortures only can deter the slaves of tyranny from expiring by their own hands. It is the invention of despotism to frighten the wretched into a sufferance of life. And it deserves attention, that the severity of religious and political doctrines, are in proportion to the defects of civil government, or its tendency to despotism. You

You may observe, in this Letter; I have had my eye on an opinion, which lies at the threshold of my subject; and which it would have been unmanly, though not, perhaps, imprudent to avoid—I mean, the obligation every man is conceived to be under, to preserve life to the utmost moment: and the crime he is supposed to commit against God, in doing any thing to shorten it.

I would totally reprobate the execrable impiety of bringing the Deity into questions of civil obligation. If men are happy members of happy societies, they cannot; for they have no motive, to destroy themselves. If wretched members of wretched societies; nothing but the fear of hell can prevent them. And if any overcome that fear, and commit the crime: I should be glad to know, where the blame must fall, from an equitable judge; on the man whose situation hath left him no motive to live; or on the magistrate, who hath forced him into suicide?

You

You will not misrepresent me as an advocate for self-murder, when I mean only to be an apologist for the wretched. The processes against those, who from disease, insanity, or misery, deprive themselves of existence; are disgraceful to the most barbarous policy.

Nature has given us life: with no intimation in regard to its continuance; but the enjoyment or pleasure it affords. And this is sufficient to induce us to run into its latest moments. Political and civil societies have deprived us of the enjoyment: and yet enjoined an obligation, which nature is silent upon; to endure, what we have no motive to endure. This, indeed, may be their support: for a tyrant would no sooner reduce his subjects to slavery, than his dominions would be depopulated by self-murder; but for the opinion, that the termination of life is a fixed and sacred gaol, which we are to reach under all inconveniences; and that an offence against the obligation is to be eternally punished.

Expe-

Experience and observation teach us, that we, like other productions, have our periods of composition and decomposition: as trees, plants, and flowers grow up, flourish, and decay; we are likewise born, grow up, and die, under the influence of natural and moral causes, which we cannot regulate or control.

That these periods are as links in the chain of causes and effects; and that they are appointed by the Being, who arranged the universe, we may suppose with probability: but that we combat his designs, disappoint his purposes; or by any use we make of the power allotted us, can interest his displeasure;—is the language of presumptuous vanity, and not of reason or philosophy.

Let us confine our consequence, my Lord, to the societies we have formed; where our virtues and crimes, lives or death, may be of some importance.

Here it is an useful doctrine, that the life of man should be sacred, in his own hands, and in those of others. Hu-
man

man enjoyments should be secured; and no person should have temptations to wish himself out of life, or to attempt that of another. In such circumstances, men will live to the utmost verge, of what is called their appointed time: but if, by moral and political arrangements, they should be rendered wretched, they will wish themselves out of life; and may, in spite of all artificial terrors, use either *lingering*, or rapid means, of drawing it to a conclusion. By these circumstances, human societies may appear to be deranged; but the order of Nature is unaffected and invariable.

I am, my Lord,

Your most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

D E A T H.

LETTER VIII.

O miserem senem, qui mortem contemnendam esse, in tam longa ætate non viderit! quæ aut plane negligenda est, si omnino extinguit animum; aut etiam optanda, si aliquo eum deducit, ubi sit futurus æternus. Atque tertium, nihil invenire potest.

CRI. SEN. S. 19.

MY LORD,

I HAVE considered Death, as a necessary event, in the great series of causes and effects. It may be proper to give some attention to the sentiments, with which we should look forward to it; if any thing like anticipation be our duty. All other beings, in our knowledge, seem to meet it, without expectation; men only, die daily, from the apprehension of dying. How far this may be the effect of superior prudence; or of pusillanimity, generated

rated by the fables of superstition, concerning death; it may be difficult to determine. On the one hand, it may be an advantage to be aware of our common fate; as plans may be formed on a knowledge of the extent of life. On the other, Nature seems to keep the matter out of view, as much as possible: the line we have to pass is so indefinite, that we are always upon it before we have any expectation of the event: the youth, who is most sanguine in his views, who seems to have the best reasons for entertaining them; and the old man, whose days cannot be numerous—are equally uncertain of the limits, at which they must give up their lives. This circumstance does not seem intended to favor prevailing apprehensions of death; nay, the hope of living an indefinite time, which possesses us at all ages, is the charm Nature has furnished, to dissipate the thoughts of death from the mind.

There would be consistency, propriety, and wisdom in this provision; if man,

like other animals, were merely a mortal being—I mean, if the circumstances which now produce his intelligence, were not to take place again, so as to constitute identity, or to give consciousness of former existence : for in happy circumstances, the thoughts of death, as an event at a determinate distance, would be interruptions, as unpleasant as they would be unnecessary.

But it is the general persuasion, that death is only one period of existence ; though its consequences be not generally and unanimously ascertained.

If we quit the dogmas of superstition, which are all peremptory on the subject ; we may be involved in perplexity on the general doctrine of the immortality of the soul. My object being the discovery, and my purpose the declaration of truth ; I will state, as fairly as I can, the different pretensions to credit of those, who, on the authority of reason, maintain the mortality and immortality of the human soul. I have, at this time, no probable and immediate

mediate interest, in the prevalence of either doctrine. There are no establishments in favor of moral truth, nor any premiums for intellectual discoveries. The satisfaction attending them, and the esteem of those, who observe our industry and integrity, must be the rewards.

Nothing, however, can be more important, than the enquiry concerning the mortality or immortality of the soul. No wise and honest man can avoid it. The foolish and wicked will save themselves the trouble; and take up convenient and prevailing opinions, in the communities, of which they are members.

The virtues are essentially different, which are founded on these different doctrines. It is by assiduous and repeated enquiries into their pretensions, truth will be ascertained; and that truth, when ascertained, will give rise to wise forms of government, and useful systems of morality. Our inconveniences are felt only in circumstances of uncertainty, and in the process of enquiry; where partial interests

militate against general truth. But no difficulties should obstruct the desire of information. The errors of scientific industry are useful; for abilities are exerted to rectify them: and they keep up a fermentation, the origin of moral, as of natural productions. Established systems are stagnant waters, where noisome and bloated reptiles add to a malignant influence: the regions of enquiry are the agitated elements, the sources of health and utility. It is the desire of excellent minds, to breath the air of these regions; though it may be their misfortune to perish in attempts to reach them. In some situations, men are placed as detached plantations on immense desarts; and they look like spots dropped from heaven. It is our duty to extend this species of cultivation; though we hazard every thing from those monsters, who plead prescriptive rights to impede our utility.

Under the influence of these motives, I must proceed on the important doctrines before

before me. The enquiry is an offence. An error on the side of popular persuasion, might save me from obloquy; but the discovery of truth, in opposition to that persuasion, would infallibly consign me to damnation.

It is my interest, not only as I wish to discover truth, but as I hope to escape injuries attending enquiry—to enter on the subject, with as much circumspection, as may be consistent with a firm and honest determination to examine it.

It cannot be construed an indignity to the Christian religion, to affirm, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not a clear and general doctrine of Nature; because zealous advocates of that religion contend, it is to Christianity we owe the discovery of the doctrine.

In early and simple periods of society, we perceive men expect to survive the grave; but they have no idea of souls. They delineate heaven as a commodious place for the gratification of bodily desires;

they provide for the wants of the body in its journey, by laying provisions on the grave; they imagine, the events of this world will recur; and they furnish the dead with garments, utensils, and arms.

In this path, we should never arrive at the origin of the soul. We must, therefore, have recourse to more improved and happier periods; where social affections are formed, and the people have leisure to indulge their imaginations.— In such situations, grief at the loss of a friend, or of a lover, would represent his image in solitude or in dreams. The melancholy delight taken in this image, would familiarise the mind to it; or give the phantom a species of reality. A rumor prevailing, that the deceased had been seen, though only in a dream; it would be considered as a communication with the invisible world; and give rise to the doctrine of ghosts.

This doctrine may be corroborated by the influence of guilt on the imagination; ever representing the person injured, in
strong

strong colours, to the mind. The offender is haunted in dreams; illness; and insanity—by the image of the man he has persecuted, oppressed, or murdered.

These circumstances are grounds for the invention of such a system of immateriality, as we find established. But we are not to omit, in this case, the effect of human vanity. A principle so absurdly extravagant, as not only to deify human nature in the subordinate classes of the heavenly world; but to make beings, in the human form, participate the empire of the universe with the Deity; nay, to make the *Deity a man*:—such a principle would not omit any tolerable occasion, to extend the limits of human existence; and to raise phantoms into immortal spirits. It is thus, on the contemplation of the first periods of society, we should account for the introduction of shades, ghosts, and spirits. That poets should eagerly seize occasions so favorable to a delusive art, is not wonderful. The art of poetry, is that of cloathing thoughts,

and personifying images. Here they have access to the hearts of the people; and secure fame, while they enjoy public affection. We find, accordingly, the first strains of poetry, on these subjects; accompanied with music of a plaintive and melancholy kind.

The interest of the people in these invisible spirits, soon became sufficiently important to engage men to pretend knowledge of their circumstances; and to conceive methods of rendering them happy or miserable. They commenced by legerdemain and conjuration: until Heaven was engaged in the business; and the Deity impiously affirmed to have issued commissions, to decide the fates of these shadowy forms. Such audacious pretensions raised them into importance, above all other beings; and the earth swarmed with heavenly ambassadors, whose artful employment had a reference to spirits. Nothing relative to political constitutions, to legislation, to public morals and public felicity, was suffered in
com-

competition with invifible interefts; and emperors, kings, and magiftrates, became priefts, or the fervants of priefts.

This, on a fair view of the hiftory of human fociety, would be the rife and progrefs of the doctrine of fpirits.

But the fubject is of too much importance to be paffed over in a curfory fketchn.

The firft abilities and learning have been employed on it; and we fhould not do it juftice, if we were to omit the arguments advanced by the wifdom, either of antient or modern times. I fhall not always diftinguifh their claims; as they are fo blended, that it would give you and me much unneceffary trouble.

I will take up the boldeft and moft ingenious pretentions of antient and modern metaphyficians.

It is faid, we have no conception of the Divinity, but that of pure energy; diffufed through the univerfe; and acting with peculiar effect in animated and rational beings. The principle, governing the human conftitution, is called the

human soul ; and being a portion of the divine energy, which is immaterial and immortal ;—it is inferred, the soul must also be immaterial and immortal ; that there is an evident distinction, between mind the mover, and body which is moved, or moveable ; and that body and mind are as opposite as affirmation and negation.

In order to strengthen these arguments, it is said, that *entia rationis*, or fictions of the mind, such as griffins, centaurs, and mountains of gold, have being ; that even negation or privation have existence ; nay, according to Aristotle, we can say, Nothing* has a being. In short, wherever we use the substantive verb *Is*, there must be some kind of being.

It is affirmed, to conceive of mind, we have no more difficulty than to conceive of matter. In the latter, we are obliged to abstract from substances, such qualities, as hot, cold, moist, dry, bit-

* Το μη ον, ειναι μη ον, φανει. MET. l. 4. c. 2.

ter, sweet, round, square, &c. in order to arrive at the substance, or the substratum for these qualities. The abstraction has been carried farther. Extension and figure, have been separated from substance; and what remained, was the matter of the antient philosophers.

Here matter and spirit are not to be distinguished: and having pursued the subject to this ideal ground, antient and modern philosophers have denied the existence of either matter or spirit.

Aware of these consequences, some recurred to principles and powers in sensible objects. They said, the soul in man is analogous to attraction in a magnet; and the property of attraction in the magnet, was called its soul ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$). This soul has not the power of self-motion; nay, it is not moved at all, but as a man is moved in a ship; or as rowers, by the motion of a boat.

In order to render the argument irrefragable; it is said, denying the immateriality and immortality of the soul, leads

to atheism. As motion could not commence in the universe, without an immaterial spirit; no motion could have taken place in the human body, without a portion of that immaterial spirit: and as in Nature, such wonderful ends could not have been accomplished by wonderful means, without being proposed, and contrived by supreme intelligence; so in the human frame, wonderful purposes could not have been accomplished, without the soul, a portion of the Divine Intelligence.

This, I think, is the metaphysical argument advanced on the subject. Reasons have been added, of stronger efficacy, though mere appeals to the passions. For example; it is not to be supposed the Deity would open the book of Nature, and shut our eyes when we had fixed them on it; that we are sent here, to learn the rudiments of knowledge and virtue; and that in a future world, we shall make a full and useful progress: that our hearts are impressed with this truth;
for

for it would be cruel to enter into connections, to be immediately broken.—What ! is a fond mother to bear the inconveniences and dangers of giving existence to a child ; and because its nurse has been negligent, or because, by accident, it has been deprived of life ; is that child to be lost to the mother for ever ? When the sweet buds of infancy are opened ; when the understanding is just formed, and the affections just awakened ; are they to be lost immediately in the grave ? What is love ; what is friendship ; what is virtue : if not the properties of a being, who is to survive the grave ? Nay, what is life ; so full of errors and miseries : if no opportunity be afforded us, to rectify and amend them ? How very rational ! How perfectly consistent with the idea of a Supreme and Benevolent Being, to imagine, every thing shall be restored in a world of spirits ; that the rudiments of life, love, friendship, and virtue, we have learnt here ;

here ; shall be of advantage, in securing perfect happiness hereafter ?

These, according to my knowledge, are the strongest arguments to prove the immortality of the soul. And in these arguments, there is nothing to induce us to fear death.

I have the honor to be,

Your Lordship's most obedient

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

LETTER IX.

Somnia, terrores magicos, miracula, sagas,
Nocturnos lemures, portentaque Theffalarides.

HOR. Lib. 2. Ep. 2.

MY LORD,

IN the discussion of this important subject, I have considered the principal arguments, alledged by reason, for the immateriality and immortality of the soul.

When men had exhausted their fancies on possibilities in worlds of spirits; necessities and conveniences called them to the immediate employments of life: and as societies cultivated sciences and arts; they enlarged and ennobled material causes; spirit is, at this time, totally banished philosophy: all things
being

being referred to mechanical and material causes.

To render matter the worthy substitute of immaterial and immortal spirit, it has been refined and sublimated into non-entity. This is the consequence of pre-possession in favor of impalpable and invisible causes. Matter has been defined to be physical points, perpetually revolving; but at distances so great, that all the matter in the solar system, is supposed, by philosophers of great gravity and reputation, to be comprizable in a nutshell. We may imagine this, to be the extreme point of absurdity on the material hypothesis; for it meets the extreme absurdity of the immaterial. Physical are refined into mathematical points, which are ideas only, and incapable of producing any thing by their motion: matter, on this hypothesis, is nothing, and can produce nothing; and, therefore, there can be no material world.

Philosophers, aware of these consequences, have defined every object of
sense,

sense, to be a compound of active and passive physical powers, viz. of matter and motion; its passive part being that substance, by whose resistance and re-action, its constituent system of motion is preserved; its active, or motive parts, that combination of directions, which constitute such a system. But what idea has your Lordship of the resistance of passiveness? What is a direction; or a combination of directions? and what are these motive parts? They are unintelligible, as the common doctrine of immateriality. Besides, the position, which is the origin of this jargon, seems to be false. What authority can be produced, that any being is a composition of matter and motion; while all we know in nature, consists of action and re-action, neither of which can reside in substances truly passive. In fact, all the appearances in nature, are produced by motion; and all we know of it is motion.

Primary powers, or the substratum of them, are not susceptible of definition;
we

we are acquainted only with their effects. Whatever be the substance, or substances, constituting man; they come, according to the discoveries of natural philosophy, under the general idea of material; for the body of a man, like that of any other animal, comes into the world, without furnishing any intimations of a soul. Materialists, therefore, deny its existence; and allege, the superiority of man over other animals and other machines; purely from the superior excellence of his construction and organization. The advocates of immateriality, have been so sensible of the force of this argument, that they have endeavoured to ward it off, by assigning periods for the entrance of the soul. These periods have varied with the systems of various advocates. According to some of them, the soul has accompanied the performance of religious ceremonies; and others affirm, it does not arrive at the human body till the age of puberty.

This

This uncertainty, as to the time when the soul takes possession, and the ridiculous controversies of religious zealots concerning it; instead of serving, discredit the general cause. For materialists having obtained the important concession, that the child is born without a soul; treat, as absurd and useless, all attempts to insert it, after the birth of the body.

This kind of materialism has been, and is still treated, as the most alarming and pernicious error. But, if we enquire, what is a soul? and define it to be an intelligent and virtuous principle; it is certain, man is born with no such principle. All the philosophers who have supposed knowledge arises from sensation, have, in fact, argued in favor of materialism; and rendered the distinction between soul and body unnecessary. It has, therefore, been alleged, as all appearances relating to man, may be accounted for by mechanical principles; the introduction of a superior and immaterial Being, would be an absurdity, and an offence to
right

right reason; which never allows more causes than are necessary to produce their effects.

Man does not differ from the lowest reptile, but in circumstances which may be fairly accounted for, by the advantages of construction, and the superiority of organization. The line between vegetable and animal life is almost imperceptible; and the gradation, from the lowest animal to man, is exactly the same in mental power as in bodily construction. If, therefore, from inability in matter to produce thought, an immaterial soul is necessary to man, it is necessary to an oyster; and the claim of the latter to immortality, on this mode of reasoning, is equal to that of the former.

Materialists have maintained; as the best arguments, on this subject, are produced by analogy, there are no facts in nature, which countenance the doctrine of immortality—that motion seems to be essential to all matter; that the vivifying principle

principle in herbs, trees, animals, and men, depends alike on organization: and when that is destroyed, herbs, trees, animals, and men, return alike to the common aggregate of universal elements.

They add, if the soul were distinct from the body; our ideas, knowledge, and virtues, would not be gradually taught by sensation, and require a particular construction of the brain and limbs: if the body were the instrument, and the soul the being playing on it—upon any fatal accident to the instrument, the soul would not be involved in the destruction; for a musician is not destroyed with his musical instrument. Like the vivifying powers of all the parts of vegetable and animal life, the faculties of the human mind grow gradually with the body; are at their maturity when the body is formed; decay when it decays; and are extinguished at its death.

But a moral objection hath met the materialists; which they have been at the pains of answering.

It

It has been said, good and evil are not justly and equally distributed here; there must be, therefore, a world of retribution: that bodies being fluctuating and variable in their constituent parts, cannot preserve so much personal identity, as to be the proper subjects of rewards and punishments; and of consequence, there must be an immaterial, unchangeable, and immortal soul.

Not to dwell on the impious impertinence, which is continually deciding on good and evil in Nature; of which we have no knowledge, no materials of knowledge, but the bare sense of pleasure and pain: not to insist on our total ignorance of justice and equity, but as we find them in societies of our own forming; and the enormous absurdity of applying ideas, so formed, to the Divine Being:—we ought to have good and clear authority, before we ascribe iniquity, injustice, or imperfection to the divine government. Besides, we shall be obliged to imagine void worlds and regions, in
which

which, by indefinite successions, the Deity is to be eternally occupied, in amending the errors of his works; employing some of his creatures in a way to increase their happiness, and torturing others with vengeance and implacability; the very conception of which is the abomination, and disgrace of the human imagination.

But to obviate the absurdity of void regions, to receive migrating beings; it has been said, they take up no room, and that they have neither length, breadth, or thickness.

To this, materialists have answered, we can have no conception of such beings; and their existence not being necessary to account for any effects, we have no reasons to imagine that existence; nay, that any hypothesis, respecting them, is pregnant with absurdity. For a non-entity to have existence is a contradiction in terms; a physical point, which has no dimension; or mathematical point, which has no substance, and is incapable of occupying place, to be sent from world to world,
or

or attached to different bodies, without the possibility of affecting them,—is the wild extravagance of spiritual insanity. And yet according to the hypothesis of immaterial substances; this Being, which is a portion, or image of the Divinity; which has not a quality in common with matter; is to influence and conduct its operations: without being capable of occupying a place, it is to dwell in the human constitution; without parts to admit of sensibility, it is to have passions, to receive the impressions of outward objects, to acquire knowledge, to become virtuous or vicious, and to receive rewards or punishments, of a substantial and palpable kind, in a future world. This is deemed the utmost extravagance of theological absurdity: for reason, thought, and action, being evidently and indisputably the properties of organized beings; when the organs are separated, every thing which can be called a soul, is wholly suspended and lost.

Some

Some philosophers, seeing the force of this kind of reasoning, and the necessity of giving up immaterial spirits, have contended, man may be immortal, though merely material; and have endeavored to support the hypothesis, by arguments from reason and analogy.

They say, there is something in the human constitution, which constitutes its identity; is invariable in idea, though all the particles of the body frequently change; and is not destroyed at death. A river continues the same, though in one day, it contain not a drop of the water, it had in another; and we have an idea of the identity of rivers, independently of the waters composing them.

But water alone does not form a river; it must move in a bed of definite length, and breadth; its channel and banks are circumstances, which preserve its identity, though the waters change every moment. We have not sufficient reasons to suppose, all the particles of the body are frequently changed during its whole exist-

ence. If it were the case ; being changed in succession, the time taken up would make the alteration imperceptible, and a sense of identity be preserved. If accomplished in a year, as some suppose, it would not be adequate to a dissolution ; and a sense of identity would be retained. The more palpable and solid parts, are like the banks and beds of rivers, or the situation and grounds of forests : by them, and not by parts immediately and hourly removed, personal identity is fixed. And it is their dissolution we denominate Death. This is like destroying the channels of rivers, or scattering, by an earthquake, the foundations of forests ; all idea of personal identity is irrecoverably lost.

The advocates for immortality on the material hypothesis say, similarity and continuity of consciousness, are the only circumstances necessary to personal identity ; and they may be preserved after death. Continuance of consciousness could not be preserved, but by successive
and

and alternate changes of constituent parts. A total change, in the same instant, would destroy consciousness. It is by taking, at one time, only small portions of the parts, on which impressions are made; and by the power of those which remain to communicate received impressions, that consciousness is preserved. Death separates all the parts at once; and, therefore, destroys all consciousness.

The opinion of stamina, or particles constituting the germ of the organical body—are not in their *proper matrix* in the grave; and, therefore, give no hopes of a resurrection.

Bonnet's experiments on the *re-production* of parts of animals, to prove the parts of future plants, animals, &c. were contained in germs; though often mentioned with the insolence of assumed superiority in natural science; is impertinent. If Bonnet's theory were demonstrated, it would prove nothing towards a resurrection. Let ingenious anatomists reproduce amputated or putrified limbs,

decayed lungs, or vitiated brains; and we will hear this pompous philosophy about germs. In the mean time, we may regret, philosophers are insolent when ignorant in natural science; not when their industry has produced an actual experiment.

Allusions to seeds in the earth, and butterflies from eggs; are similar to the philosophy of germs.

As the last resource of distressed sophists in this matter, they say, there would be nothing more miraculous in our resurrection than in our birth.

What *philosopher* will say, our birth is miraculous? or *reason* concerning a future resurrection, which is to be miraculous? What modest disciple of Nature, will require the assent and hope of men on such absurdities?

The case of caterpillars becoming butterflies, may amuse sophists. It is taken for granted, caterpillars are unconscious of their future destination. We know not they are. The transformation may
render

render them different beings, and destroy recollection. But what has this in common with the transformation of animals, or men? The former is a fact in nature; the latter a dream in the imagination of persons defective in natural science.

The allusion to extinguishing a candle, and lighting it up again, is puerile. And the idea of the power of God, to re-compose, what has been de-composed, is unphilosophical; for it is not warranted by a single fact. The act of decomposition, in nature, is a transition from one mode of existence to another; without preserving, in the latter, the properties, which distinguish the former. And this is the idea of death, according to the ancient and genuine doctrine of those philosophers, who are called materialists: for they not only deny the immateriality and immortality of the soul; but affirm, there is no authority or reason to believe, the body, when decomposed by death, will,

by any process on the known laws of Nature, be ever recomposed.

I have fairly and impartially stated the arguments, advanced by philosophers on the immortality and mortality of the human soul. I shall pursue the different doctrines, into their different consequences, in another letter.

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

D E A T H.

L E T T E R X.

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas;
Atque metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum,
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.*

VIRG. GEORG. Lib. 2.

MY LORD,

HAVING considered the different arguments, advanced by philosophy, for the mortality and immortality of the soul; if your Lordship will have patience, we will descend into opinions and fables, on which the creeds and religions of the common people have been founded.

Diodorus Siculus says, ‘ the punishments of the wicked in Tartarus; the mansions of the blessed in the Elysian Fields; and some other tenets, are evidently borrowed from the funeral rites

‘ of the Egyptians.’ The day of interment was intimated to the judges; then to the family and friends of the deceased. The intimation was given by mentioning the person’s name; and by saying, he is going to pass the Lake, on the confines of which were the happy plains, called the mansions of the dead, where the bodies were deposited in tombs. The judges assembled; and before the coffin was put into the boat, the law permitted all the people to state their complaints. If convicted of having led a wicked life; the judges condemned him, and he was deprived of burial. But if the accuser failed in his proofs, he incurred severe penalties. When no accuser appeared; or when he was convicted of calumny, all the relations laid aside their mourning, and celebrated the praises of the deceased. They extolled his piety, his justice, his courage; and prayed the Gods to receive him into the mansions of the blessed. The whole audience applauded the funeral oration; added new encomiums; and con-

congratulated the dead on entering a peaceful and happy abode.

Porphiry has preserved the absolution, the priests used on that occasion.

‘ O Sun, thou first Divinity ! and ye celestial Gods ! from whom men have derived life, vouchsafe to receive me this day into your holy tabernacles. I have endeavoured, to the best of my power, to render my life acceptable to you. I have demeaned myself with the highest veneration to the Gods, whom I was taught to worship in my infancy. I never failed in my duty to those who gave me being. My hands are pure from my neighbor’s blood. I maintained an inviolable regard to truth and fidelity. And may I not appeal to the silence of men, who have nothing to lay to my charge, as a sure testimony of my integrity ? If however, any personal, or secret faults, have escaped me, either in eating or drinking, these entrails bear the blame !’ The relations produced the entrails ; which were

thrown into the lake : and the body was conveyed to the mansions of the dead.

The Greek, Roman, and the Christian mythologies, are borrowed from these customs ; more than from those of the East. If we believe accounts lately written of Eastern mythology ; the doctrine of the Bramins, concerning souls, has more consistency than any other : for supposing the Divine Nature to be æther, or elementary fire, souls may be plausibly supposed emanations from it ; and after a certain number of emigrations, they may return to their origin.

Pythagoras has blended Eastern metaphysics with the gross mythology of Egypt. He says, the soul at death is conducted by Mercury into the purest air ; there it becomes like the Gods ; while the wicked are tormented by furies, without intermission. But after the season of purification, they return to the earth to animate new bodies. He first taught publicly in Europe the doctrine of transmigration ; into animals, fishes, birds ;
and

and in three thousand years, into human bodies. A circulation of this sort, in infinitum, is the Pythagorean doctrine of immortality: and the first conceptions of it induced the Egyptians, as well as the inhabitants of the East, to neglect their houses as *inns*, and to bestow considerable sums on their tombs—it being of less importance to build for the living than the dead.

Socrates distinguishes three states of souls, or rather attenuated bodies. Those who had not great merit, or great vices, inhabited the confines of Acherusia; where, being purified by water, they received the little reward they deserved. The souls of the wicked wandered around their tombs, where they were tormented; and having drank of Lethe, entered new bodies, according to their qualities. The souls of the virtuous went immediately into the Elysian fields.

Plato says, when a man dies, he goes into a divine region, and is there judged. If his life has been agreeable to reason,

he is advanced to an honorable apartment; where he enjoys prosperity and pleasure in the society of the Gods. Bad men sink into a noisome abyfs; dwell in perfect darknefs; and suffer exquisite misery. This philosopher speaks of the soul as a palpable and material substance, though he wishes to be otherwise understood: and in his descriptions of hell, of the Elyfian fields, their rivers, judges, furies, &c. he only copies Homer.

Aristotle speaks of the soul as a fifth substance, distinct from the four elements. It is reasonable, if Aristotle had been obliged to explain the idea, he would have defined a soul, to be the effect and property of an organized body; like reason, thought, and sensation.

Moses does not appear to have had an idea of spirit; nor was the belief of it any part of the original religion of the Jews. After their captivities under the kings of Persia, they discovered an attachment to the fables of the East; and blended the doctrines of immortality with their religious

gious tenets. The cabalists affirmed, souls are produced by the Holy Ghost; that spirits produce spirits, as ideas do ideas: that the soul being an emanation from the Deity, every part of whom is infinite, multiplies itself infinitely; that all souls were contained in that of Adam, and finned with him.

The fathers of the church have adopted *all convenient* opinions on the subject. They are sometimes cabalists, sometimes Pythagoreans, sometimes Platonists, according to prevailing views. Some believed a state of general sleep would take place until the resurrection; supported by the opinion, that Enoch, Elijah, and Jesus, had ascended to heaven without quitting their bodies. Others disposed of souls in receptacles and prisons, from the creation to the general judgment. To these souls Jesus preached. Good spirits were sent to heaven, and the wicked to purgatory: all thought the addition of the body necessary to the happiness of
paradise

paradise, and the torments or miseries of hell.

Descartes, Malebranche, Leibnitz, &c. have afforded no new light on the subject. Philosophers have only indulged imaginations; it may, therefore, be more entertaining to attend to the reveries of poets, who pretend to no higher authorities than fable, tradition, and fancy.

These votaries of the Muses, whose object is not truth, and whose talent is not reason; have taken up the sentiments of philosophers, and used them according to their fancies. They have placed the Elysian fields or heaven, in the middle region of the air; in the moon; in the sun; in the centre of the earth; and in one of the fortunate islands. Some copied the exaggerated accounts of Betica, now called Andalusia, in Spain; where the Phenicians resorted, and gave rise to the descriptions of the Elysian fields. The antients represent it watered with rivers, streams, and fountains; blessed

bleſſed with charming plains, woods, enchanted groves, mountains with mines of gold and ſilver, and a ſoil producing pleaſing abundance.

Tarteffus, in the extremity of this province, is thought to be Tartarus. The ancients appear to have been acquainted with nothing beyond it; they thought the ſun went to bed every evening in the ocean, and that here the region of eternal darkneſs commenced.

Homer deſcribes Ulyſſes, in his voyage, as arriving on the confines of this country, as on thoſe of hell.

Now ſunk, the ſun from his ærial height,
And o'er the ſhaded billows ruſh'd the night:
When lo! we reach'd old Ocean's utmoſt bounds,
Where rocks controul'd his waves with ever-during
mounds.

The ſhip we moor on theſe obſcure abodes;
Diſbark the ſheep, an off'ring to the Gods;
And hell-ward bending, o'er the beach, deſcry
The doleful paſſage to th' infernal ſky.

Thus ſolemn rites and holy vows we paid,
To all the phantom nations of the dead.

When

When lo! appear'd along the dusky coasts,
 Thin airy shoals of visionary ghosts;
 Fair pensive youths, and soft enamour'd maids;
 And wither'd elders pale and wrinkled shades;
 Ghastly with wounds the forms of warriors slain;
 Stalk'd with majestic port, a martial train:
 These, and a thousand more, swarm'd o'er the
 ground,
 And all the dire assembly shriek'd around.

HOM. ODYSSEY. B. xi.

It was the doctrine of poetic theology,
 that the body changed into ashes; the spirit
 returned to the first cause; and the soul,
 the phantom and image of the body, de-
 scended to the infernal regions.

The entrance to these regions is de-
 scribed by Virgil.

Just in the gate; and in the jaws of hell,
 Revengeful cares, and sullen sorrows dwell;
 And pale diseases, and repining age;
 Want, fear, and famine's unresisted rage:
 Here toils and death, and death's half-brother sleep,
 Forms terrible to view, their centry keep:
 With anxious pleasures of a guilty mind,
 Deep frauds before, and open force behind:
 The furies iron beds, and strife that shakes
 Her hissing tresses, and unfolds her snakes.

After

After certain purgations in a vast forest, and a general judgment, they entered either Elysium or Tartarus—of which we have the following description :

These holy rites perform'd, they took their way,
Where long extended plains of pleasure lay.
The verdant fields with those of heaven may vie;
With æther vested, and a purple sky :
The blissful seats of happy souls below:
Stars of their own, and their own suns they know,
Their airy limbs, in sports they exercise,
And, on the green, contend the wrestler's prize ;
Some, in heroic verse, divinely sing,
Others in artful measures lead the ring.

VIRG. EN. B. vi.

But to avoid the gross absurdities of this system, they blended it with that of Pythagoras; which is beautifully described in the following lines :

Know first, that heav'n and earth's compacted
frame,
And flowing waters and the starry flame,
And both the radiant lights, one common soul
Inspires and feeds and animates the whole.
This active mind infus'd thro' all the space,
Unites and mingles with the mighty mass.

Hence

Hence men and beasts the breath of life obtain;
 And birds of air and monsters of the main.
 Th' ætherial vigor is in all the same,
 And every soul is fill'd with equal flame:
 As much as earthy limbs, and gross alloy
 Of mortal members, subject to decay,
 Blunt not the beams of heav'n and edge of day.
 From this coarse mixture of terrestrial parts,
 Desire and fear, by turns possess their hearts:
 And grief and joy: nor can the groveling mind,
 In the dark dungeon of the limbs confin'd,
 Assert the native skies; or own its heavenly kind.
 Nor death itself can wholly wash their stains:
 But long-contracted filth even in the soul remains.
 The relicks of inveterate sin they wear,
 And spots of sin obscene, in every face appear.
 For this, are various penances enjoin'd;
 And some are hung to bleach upon the wind;
 Some plung'd in waters, others purg'd in fires,
 'Till all the dregs are drain'd, and all the rust ex-
 pires.
 All have their manes, and those manes bear:
 The few, so cleans'd, to the abodes repair:
 And breathe, in ample fields, the soft Elysian air.
 Then are they happy, when by length of time
 The scurf is worn away, of each committed crime.
 No speck is left, of their habitual stains;
 But the pure æther of the soul remains.
 But when a thousand rolling years are past,
 (So long their punishments and penance last)

Whole

Whole droves of minds are, by the driving God,
Compell'd to drink the deep Lethean flood:
In large forgetful draughts to steep the cares
Of their past labours, and their irksome years.
That, unremembring of its former pain,
The soul may suffer mortal flesh again.

VIRG. EN. B. vi.

Souls condemned to Tartarus or hell,
were represented as dwelling there for
ever; and the description of the place is
perfectly horrible.

The hero, looking on the left, espied,
A lofty tow'r, and strong on every side
With treble walls, which Phlegethon surrounds,
Whose fiery flood the burning empire bounds:
And press'd betwixt the rocks, the bellowing
noise resounds. }

Wide is the fronting gate, and rais'd on high
With adamantine columns, threats the sky,
Vain is the force of man, and heav'n's as vain,
To crush the pillars which the pile sustain.
Sublime on these a tow'r of steel is rear'd;
And dire Tisiphoné there keeps the ward,
Girt in her sanguine gown, by night and day,
Observant of the souls that pass the downward way.
From hence are heard, the groans of ghosts, the
pains
Of sounding lashes, and of dragging chains.

These

These are the realms of unrelenting fate :
 And awful Rhadamanthus rules the state.
 He hears, and judges each committed crime ;
 Inquires into the manner, place, and time ;
 The conscious wretch must all his acts reveal ;
 (Loth to confess, unable to conceal :)
 From the first moment of his vital breath,
 To his last hour of unrepenting death.
 Straight o'er the guilty ghost, the fury shakes
 The sounding whip, and brandishes her snakes :
 And the pale sinner, with her sisters, takes
 Then of itself, unfolds th' eternal door :
 With dreadful sounds, the brazen hinges roar.

Had I a hundred mouths, a hundred tongues,
 And throats of brass, inspir'd with iron lungs,
 I could not half those horrid crimes repeat :
 Nor half the punishments those crimes have met.

VIRG. EN. B. vi.

This may be considered as an historic
 account of the opinions, concerning the
 future destiny of souls, which civil po-
 licy adopted ; which poetry adorned and
 rendered popular. We see the origin
 of these opinions in the Egyptian cus-
 toms, at the interment of the dead.—
 And the inference from history, is the
 same

same we must make from the several arguments and reasons of metaphysicians—that men were originally conversant only with bodies; that they proceeded to imagine shades; airy spirits; portions of elementary spirits—till the later Platonists asserted the opinions of immaterial substances. But all the doctrines of future punishment and reward, which either policy or superstition have established, are evidently on the supposition, that the beings to partake and suffer them, are material.

I am, my Lord,

Your most obedient

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

D E A T H.

L E T T E R XI.

—Me vero delectat; idque primum ita esse velim; deinde etiamsi non sit, mihi tamen persuadere velim.

CIC. TUSC.

MY LORD,

ON the subject of death, I have been induced to glance at the doctrines, which have furnished all its importance, and have drawn to it the principal attention of mankind:—and having considered the metaphysical arguments, on man as a mortal or an immortal being: and given a short account of popular opinions concerning souls; we may take up the matter in a moral and political view; and try the different doctrines, by the difference of their effects.

On

On this and every view of the subject; I wave all consideration of the prevalence of opinions; because it proves nothing in regard to truth or utility. The affected concern for what is absurdly, if not impiously, called the moral character of the Deity, I hold in the utmost contempt. Evil and error may shade the globe in moral processes, as waters involve its surface; without furnishing proofs or presumptions in their favor; or warranting any reference *from such creatures as we are*, to moral principles in the Divine Nature. Indeed, the character or attributes of the Deity, are poetic fabrications of the human imagination, perhaps of human vanity; ever bringing the Universal Principle to a level with man; enduing him with affections and qualities, which *suppose him associated*, and the member of some earthly community. Hence the reference to his mercy and compassion; his justice, and even his goodness: qualities which, in a philosophical sense, have not always even an analogy
to

to those by which the processes of Nature are continually carried on. All reference to these qualities, which have no existence out of society, because they are created by society, cannot be admitted as argument. My general silence, therefore, on pretences from the moral character of the Deity; will, I trust, be accounted for: not from an apprehension of their force and validity, but a conviction, that no such moral character exists, except in mythology, fable, and poetry; and that it is absurd, in accurate disquisitions, whatever may be allowed in persuasive orations, to say, God is merciful, or even just; as to say, he has hands and feet, or is hungry and thirsty.

We are to regard the moral, as we do the natural world; and to consider ignorance errors and vices in the former; as we do desarts torrents and eruptions in the latter—these things are circumstances in the general processes of nature; of the good or evil of which we have often no comprehension: it is when they
come

come into relations with our little regulations or our little societies, that ideas arise of benefit or injury, and therefore of good or evil. It is by effects on human societies, we judge of the different doctrine of the mortality or immortality of man.

I will not enter on the question, whether society has its origin in parental authority; in a compact between the governors and the governed; or in a divine and miraculous regulation. It is sufficient for my purpose, that no society can exist, without certain inducements to observe its regulations. That these inducements have been various, as the forms of government in which they have taken place; and that the societies, as well as the motives on which they depend, have arisen from the various circumstances of men—may be true: and may induce a philosopher, who considers the universe, in the aggregate, as a perfect system of connected causes—to say, they are equally good; because all sub-

ject to the same necessity That government, therefore, which is supported merely by the benefits it bestows; that which requires reverſionary expectations; and that which is influenced by the terrors of hell:—are all equal in the univerſal ſyſtem, and all involved in univerſal cauſes.

But as happineſs of every kind is ordained to be the effect of ſome action or ſome effort; the purchaſe of ſome inconvenience or ſome evil:—we ſeem deſtined, in ſocieties, to go through all poſſible errors, or to taſte all poſſible miſeries, in order to form and reliſh a ſtate of ſocial happineſs. In this view of things, the very conſideration or compariſon of the ſanctions of human ſocieties, which may be the neceſſary effect of inconvenience and wretchedneſs, becomes a very reſpectable cauſe (for, in my apprehenſion, there is a diſtinction in cauſes) of improvements and revolutions in ſocial regulations.

On theſe accounts, we may not be miſemployed in comparing the different governments,

vernments, under which the sanctions of present or future motives, have, and may be used; with a view to ascertain their effects on the morals and happiness of men.

In the first tendencies and operations of Nature to form communities, we observe only security, or freedom from the apprehension of violence: and the first virtue is justice, enforced by the power of the state. In this case, to guard the weak against the strong, nothing more is necessary, than to counteract force by force, or by the apprehension of force: the state undertaking to retaliate injuries on offenders, to prevent the repetition of offences. This is the first improvement into virtue, of the only principle we are born with, a sense of pleasure and pain: and here the desire is formed, which is the origin of intellectual and moral happiness; that of finding happiness in the happiness of others. On these simple and natural principles, we may not only imagine, societies are susceptible of the highest possi-

ble improvements, without the aid of external sanctions from heaven or hell; but we have facts to give probability to such an hypothesis. The small societies formed in Greece, previous to the splendor of the Greek name, were colonies from Egypt; who availed themselves of Egyptian fables, to obtain a settlement among the original inhabitants. As they advanced in the art of producing public happiness; the real art of government; they sunk these fables into dishonor; simplified political regulations: till, in the last and greatest efforts of their understanding, they produced the governments of Athens and Sparta; whose morals had no motive, out of the societies where they were immediately practised. In Italy, numerous little estates were absorbed by the Roman Republic; which adopted the superstitions, while it took possession of the territories, of its neighbors. These, however, when collected into Rome, had no credit or consequence; but as expedients, to a government which deemed every

every thing useful that extended its conquests. Roman virtue, public and private, was supported by internal regulations; of present and temporary effect. Roman glory, in the highest enthusiasm of that passion, was confined to this world: for the Romans do not seem to have had an idea of a future state, until the Greek philosophy introduced it. And though maintained by the eloquence of Cicero, and the daily instructions of Greek philosophers in the schools of Rome; the doctrine was so slow in its progress, that when the first Christians appeared, one of the accusations against them was, they preached the doctrine of future rewards and punishments; rendered men indifferent to their country; and remiss or cowardly in its defence.

The immediate provisions of Nature, in regard to morals and public happiness, seem to be comprised in the regulations of justice and the desire of public happiness: even the passion for glory, which drew the Greeks beyond the confines of

their territories ; led Alexander to ravage and subdue the world ; which stimulated the Romans to deeds of military valour, and enabled them to enslave mankind ;— had no motive beyond present and political advantages attending the gratification of unlimited power.

The world, however, has exhibited scenes of equal brilliancy on different motives.

We have observed, on the first establishment of justice ; in consequence of which the strong is not to possess the property, or person of the weak, and every man is to seek his happiness, while he is witness to the happiness of another ; that a state of mutual assistance or services takes place, and the most amiable, the most useful of all social principles is adopted—that of becoming happy through the happiness of others.

Here, as in other cases, the line which separates good and evil is imperceptible. While some adopt the natural or genuine principle, of seeking the multiplied

plied gratifications of benevolence, public spirit, friendship, and love; which may prefer mankind, a country, a friend, a mistress, to any private interest: others, seeking personal gratification even in society, exchange only the mode of preying on others, which they had been forced out of by the regulations of justice. Regarding men, only for the personal advantages they afford them, they lose the affection which distinguishes society from a state of nature: and, by substituting selfishness for the desire of happiness, lay the foundation of those errors and vices, which infest the world.

I suppose all the difference of men; and all the virtues or vices which are the consequences of those differences, to originate either in the opinion, that the moment we enter society, we are to drop personal considerations or personal principles; to live for our families, our friends, our country; and find happiness in their happiness: or, retaining them, and acting on the pure principles of self-love, regard all around

us only as instruments of our gratification, and means of procuring some advantage. I am so convinced of this truth, that I never saw a good action which was not, in my apprehension, performed on the former principle ; or a bad action, which was not directly referable to the latter. It is in vain to say, the ill-effects of self-love, may be obviated by moral policy ; which directs men to do good to others, as they sow seed, in hopes of harvest. The human mind is not capable of any process in this matter, analogous to that of sowing seed with the expectation of harvest. It is actuated by instantaneous passion : and if not careful to conceive or cultivate affections for mankind, or immediately to enjoy their happiness, without attending to their being the instruments of its own—if it view them only as instruments, it must become instantly vicious ; and regard itself only, as the being to be secured, affected, or gratified by all the events in the world.

On

On this principle of selfishness, variously modified; the various deviations from the first and simple regulations of society, in the different forms of government now prevailing, took place. A transition was soon and easily made from one object to another, as the end of human society. On the establishment of magistracy, the principle of selfishness separated the magistrate from the public; as it generally separates the individual: and made him regard society, of which he was the creature, instrument, and servant; as the occasion of private aggrandizement or power. However astonishing the despotism of a few men, over whole nations; the steps to it are easy and obvious to the eye of ambition. On the first deviation from institutions immediately suggested by Nature, the public object is changed. When the power of government is to be supported, in any degree, for its own sake; the people must have a motive different from any we have hitherto pointed out, as arising out of the constitution of society.

ciety. A regard to the public, as the source of private happiness, and the desire of promoting it; or the genuine passion of patriotism and public spirit, cannot exist, where the effects of public services centre in the power or glory of the magistrate, or the government. This is the reason, politicians have sought motives out of society, to lead, or force men into its duties. They have exhibited and illustrated, by external motives, what, in speculation, must have been an inexplicable paradox—they have induced men to give up their property, their services, their persons, to consign the advantages of society; and, in being slaves, to become the most wretched beings in nature: on motives merely ideal; a view to the joys of heaven, or apprehension of the torments of hell.

We observe, that motives have been invented or heightened, according to the exigencies of vicious governments; according to their deviations towards despotism; *and the last, the utmost effort of human*

human villainy, is discoverable in the doctrine of eternal damnation.

The effects of these motives, have been astonishing. That they should have induced men gradually to relinquish their civil rights, is perhaps accountable: that, in the ebullitions of zeal for the establishment of a new religion, they should have enabled the first Christians, who were excluded the advantages of society or persecuted in it, to yield up their wretched lives, or to seek the honors of martyrdom; is not surprizing. But when the religion of Christ and that of Mahomet were established, that the great nations of the earth should relinquish the rights of social beings, and become the slaves of priests or kings, to obtain the rewards or avoid the punishments of another world—seems astonishing. The general prevalence of despotic power, is owing to this circumstance. We know that Christians and Mahometans were employed for centuries, in wasting the earth; destroying or enslaving its inhabitants, by acts of military

conduct and valor, which rivalled the glory of Greece and Rome—on motives, apparently originating in another world.

I think history may render us competent to decide on the following proposition:—

Are the motives of social and public spirit, or the desire of social and public happiness, sufficient to hold men in society; to produce the useful virtues of the mind and heart:—or is it necessary to have recourse to the hopes of future rewards and the fear of future punishments? In other words, would men, would societies, be most virtuous and happy, under the firm persuasion of the mortality, or the immortality of the human soul?

I shall make some efforts, on this ground, another time.

I am, my Lord,

Your most obedient

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

DEATH.

D E A T H.

L E T T E R XII.

MY LORD,

IN our enquiries, on the general subject of death, we are come to the important questions :

Whether the doctrine of future rewards and punishments be necessary or advantageous, to private morality and public happiness? Or, whether a clear and firm persuasion, that we are to live only here, would effectually secure virtuous morals and general happiness?

We are at perfect liberty to discuss the questions; and to determine on them, without danger of committing offence against the supposed obligations of piety. Various

rious morals and various degrees of happiness are formed from different causes; on the general, the only foundation furnished by Nature—a sensibility to pleasure and pain. We bring into the world, only this sensibility—and the modifications of it into virtues or affections, are produced by causes, which however sacred from superstition or policy, are in common with all other things, subject to examination and animadversion.

A sense of pleasure or pain is the result of the existence, and productive of the various qualities of individuals, who constitute societies. This may be the only indisputable truth in morals or politics. If any other had been equally important, it would have been equally evident. When the sensibility has received an indefinite variety of modifications, by the co-incidence of circumstances or causes; and assumed the forms of virtues, vices, principles of morals, and maxims of government, not only different,

ent, but opposite to each other—we are lost in the extensive and intricate view. But if virtues, vices, principles, or constitutions of government, be taken in detail; the quantity of pleasure and pain, or of happiness and misery, may be separated and ascertained, by an analysis of those compositions, in which they may be included. By ascertaining the quantity of pleasure and pain, in the effects of various principles, institutions, customs, or opinions; we may determine their comparative value. Every thing is to be estimated in this manner, by the happiness or misery it produces. — My Lord, we are to enquire, whether men would be most happy, under the firm persuasion of their mortality, or of their immortality?

I will state the advantages, on each opinion, as fairly or impartially as I am able:—if you rectify my errors, I will thank you. Under the persuasion, that I may be immortal, I should give the following reasons, in favor of the doctrine.

That

That human customs and governments not producing, in all cases, a sufficient quantity of happiness, to render life desirable; in some, not sufficient to render it tolerable—it is a wise and benevolent provision, that we should have the hope or prospect of a future state; where experience may remedy our errors, or provide the proper means of eternal security and happiness. If there were no real ground for the opinion; the very hope excited by it, would answer a similar purpose: nay, this hope is the circumstance which gives it a decided preference to the opposite opinion; for our enjoyment consisting more in hope than in possession, a persuasion of the immortality of the human soul must be a perpetual source of satisfaction; which we could not derive from actual enjoyment. This is the only consolation which can be imagined, under the miseries arising from error and vice; which no conduct or prudence can remove: no circumstances can deprive us of hope; therefore, no condition can
be

be destitute of satisfaction.—This, I think, is the first and strongest argument in favor of a future state.

I should also affirm, the doctrine is necessary to the continuance of human societies, as they actually exist. — The principles of those societies are such, as not to furnish sufficient motives for good conduct; without the rewards and punishments of a future world:—the hope or apprehension of these events hang over the mind in private; and destroy, in the bud, those weeds, which would over-run the state. In some communities, existence depends on apprehensions in regard to futurity: for life, in every view of it, becoming undesirable, the people would throw it off with detestation; and suicide would be the general remedy for misery—but ‘that the fear of something after death, puzzles the will.’

I should add a stronger reason, in the opinion of some people—the necessity of remedying errors; of allotting rewards to the good, or punishments to the wicked,

ed, with more equity than is here exercised. In this department of the divine government, matters are so conducted, that the virtuous are frequently miserable, and the vicious happy : and if a judgment should not take place to invert these distributions ; or to allot happiness to the good and misery to the wicked, Providence must be subject to imputations, which would dishonor human governments. Indeed every circumstance shews this to be a state of trial for futurity : unequal periods of existence ; inequality of situations and advantages are various circumstances of probation ; the general wishes, hopes, nay, the fixed persuasion of mankind, that they shall survive, are impressions of the divine hand ; suggestions of the Deity, which he could not disappoint, consistently with benevolence and goodness. Every thing in nature seems to arrive at perfect maturity, or to answer the purposes of its creation, except man ; who, if he is not to live hereafter, had better, in most cases, not
to

to have lived at all.--These are the strongest reasons, I know, to support the utility of the doctrine.

On the other hand, under the persuasion, that I am, like all other creatures around me, only a mortal being—I should say, the hope of futurity is pernicious in all the views that have been delineated. The preference of hope to possession, is the effect of a weak and puerile imagination, which employs itself in visions or reveries. Reason being constant only in realities, knows no such principles. Even in inconvenient or wretched situations, where it may be supposed hope, by furnishing employment for the imagination, may suspend misery, or be useful; it is the very circumstance which rivets the chains of indolence and despair: it is the *ignis fatuus*, which draws off the man's attention from his immediate path; gradually multiplies his inconveniences and errors, until it plunges him in irremediable misery. Persons of superior talents have occasionally perceived the doctrine

trine of nature, respecting distant hopes. Julius Cæsar, when he landed an army in Britain, set fire to his ships : and the soldiers did their duty ; which they might not have done, if, on the first difficulties, their imaginations could have recurred to Italy. Nature has formed and fixed us to this earth ; all the intermediate spaces, which separate us from other worlds, are impassable : we can conceive no means of communication.— Here therefore, and here only, we are to fix our attention, to employ our talents, and to enjoy our happiness. What folly, what cruelty, to hold up to the mind hopes of distant impossibilities ; the first effect of which must be inattention to present and necessary duty : which inattention will produce error, standing in need of still stronger future hopes or future delusions—until vice and misery have nothing to alleviate them, but the reveries of weak or disordered imaginations.

That

That societies, formed on the opinion of a future life, depend on it for support or continuance, may be true; but this circumstance does not prove either the truth, or the utility of the opinion. Men enter into society from necessity. They form constitutions to procure public happiness. Where this object is obtained, the government always, and infallibly, supports itself. Men may reason fallaciously of political principles; but they feel truly in regard to happiness and misery. Any circumstance, therefore, which draws the attention from the only end of human society; the only plain or simple test by which all regulations, laws, and institutions are to be tried—is an injury. This is the case with the doctrine of a future state. It confuses or perverts our ideas on the purposes of human society. It teaches mankind to rank governments, magistrates, kings, and other occasions of their sufferings, as they do storms, earthquakes, or pestilences; among the ordinances of Providence, to which

which they are to submit in a state of trial, to obtain better conditions, or better situations in a future world. Who does not see, that all wretched constitutions of government owe their support and continuance to this doctrine? It deludes or amuses the people, from enquiries necessary to their relief. False hope sooths the mind under evils, which reason and virtue would remove. Patience, submission, hypocrisy, become the substitutes of those great or excellent qualities, which would perfect the institutions of social life, and make communities happy. Where remedies can not be applied; where combinations of errors and faults have defeated every purpose of society; have made a community the prey of a few, or of one—a *diabolical doctrine* hovers over the wretch who has nothing left: though ardently wishing to force himself from misery—he is terrified into forbearance by the apprehension of eternal torments. Who will say, that despotism would find slaves in any part of the earth, if the doctrines

doctrines of futurity were withdrawn? Who will maintain, that any form of government, producing public evils or public miseries, would long subsist; if men, having no hopes or fears beyond this world, had their attention confined to the regulations and interests of society? If these things cannot be affirmed, or maintained—if despotism, tyranny, and oppression, in various degrees, be the causes of all the miseries we endure: if this doctrine be the principal support of those evils—what are the illusions of pious romance, or the tales and legends of poetic superstition, when fairly compared with palpable and enormous mischiefs! They are like the decorations of a fiend: charms to injure; or beauties to destroy.

It may occur to some prudent persons, these sentiments, whether true or false, are improper to be stated; as they may be misunderstood; or be imprudently applied. I will take care, they shall not be misunderstood, by any man who
 chooses

chuses to be informed on the subjects, in the most unequivocal phrases of the English language. It is true, and it should be obvious, that the doctrine of a future state, either of rewards or punishments—by holding distant and false expectations before the mind, draws its attention from its immediate and proper employment—that the ministers of that doctrine, by blending with the officers and magistrates of communities, have had the address to keep the end or purpose of society out of view; have prevailed on men to acquiesce in the deprivation of civil rights, or the loss of public happiness, by the promises and threats of futurity;—that this doctrine, has in all ages served the purposes of despotism, tyranny, or political oppression—that, by preventing slaves from withdrawing by suicide, from a life uniformly wretched, it perpetuates misery,—and by furnishing pretences for upholding the motley equivocal fabricks, called forms of government—it is the occasion of all the evils which desolate the world.

Away

Away then, with that caution which would check enquiry and freedom on the subject. Away with that selfish dishonest principle, which would *keep truths from public view*, or hide them among the useless arcana of a dastardly philosophy! What are philosophers! What is philosophy! What is truth! if they affect not the principles and institutions of society! The miser, who buries his treasure in the earth; and the philosopher, who keeps the effects of his enquiries from public view; are characters equally useless, equally contemptible in the estimation of reason. But, in the name of common sense, what renders the doctrine of immortality sacred: what should make us cautious in examining its truth or falsehood; or plainly declaring our opinions? It has had full time to shew its importance and utility to the world. If it does not bring indisputable credentials; if its utility is so far from being questionable, that it may be demonstrated a certain,

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tain, general, and important injury—will its pretended utility, to keep the common people in order, under governments which oppress them, be assigned as a reason for treating it with respect? It furnishes the buttresses of wretched and ruinous fabrics, which afford neither comfort nor shelter to their miserable inhabitants. The sooner they are withdrawn, the sooner will the people be furnished with better habitations.

As to the presumption in favor of futurity, from apparent errors to be remedied; sketches to be filled up; or plans to be executed—this will not bear much consideration. It is the suggestion of human vanity and ignorance. There is not a circumstance in the world, that has the least appearance of error or imperfection—but as it refers to human societies. A mistake in the divine government is impossible; no man has it in his power to commit an offence against the Deity; no man, who has an understanding above that of an

an idiot, will talk of sketches to be filled up, or plans to be executed in the administration of the universe. That the lives of animals are of unequal length; that their portions of happiness or misery are unequal, may be true; as it may be true, that the most fragrant and beautiful flowers may be trodden with contempt, while others, less valuable, are cultivated in the gardens of princes. Will it be said, because the violet has drooped unobserved in the wilderness, or has been crushed by the foot of a brute—that it is entitled to a resurrection, in order to answer the purposes of its creation? The blooming infant, snatched away by death, is like that violet nipped in the bud: each having equally obeyed the laws of the Deity, in just entering life, and disappearing; each equally destitute of all claim to immortality. That we should wish the child we love never to die; nay, that affection should hold before us the image of a beloved friend; and make it

difficult to credit, that so much excellence can be no more—all these are amiable delusions, which I have often and deeply felt: but they prove nothing to rest our hopes upon in the cool hours of reflection. They amount only to wishes; which are among the most frivolous and most injurious occupations of the human mind.

In short, if the doctrine of a future state, by withdrawing our attention from present interests, makes us misunderstand or neglect them—If, in the long trial we have had of its effects—they have not been favorable to private or public virtue—If, under vicious governments, it has been so far from correcting their effects, and producing virtue or happiness in opposition to them, that it has been the support of those governments; nay, that the worst species of despotism, civil, political, and religious, has been created by this doctrine—it is time it should be reprobated; *the efforts of the world should be exerted to break this great chain, which*
bends

*bends the necks of its inhabitants to slavery
and wretchedness.*

I have the honor to be,

My Lord,

Your most obedient

And most humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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A
L I T U R G Y
O N
THE PRINCIPLES OF THEISM.

Ζεὺς πρῶτος γένητο, Ζεὺς ὕστατος ἀρχικέραυνος,
Ζεὺς κεφαλὴ, Ζεὺς μέσσα Δίος ὅς ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται
Ζεὺς ἄρσην γένητο Ζεὺς ἄμβροτος ἐπλετο νυμφῇ.
Ζεὺς πυθμην γαίης τε καὶ οὐρανοῦ ἀξεροεντος.
Ζεὺς πνοιὴ πάντων. Ζεὺς ἀκαμάτε πυρὸς ὀρμή.
Ζεὺς πόντε ρίζα, Ζεὺς ἥλιος ἠδὲ σελήνη.
Ζεὺς βασιλεὺς, Ζεὺς αὐτὸς ἀπάντων ἀχιγενέθλος.

Orph. Fragm. p. 368.

L I T T L E

THE PRINCIPLES OF THEM.



P R E F A C E.

THIS Liturgy is not, like the English Book of Common Prayer, a translation of the Roman Catholic Missal;—it is not, like the imitations and amendments of that translation, intended to form a sect, for the emolument of the author:—it is a specimen of Public Service, in which Philosophers might join, without insulting their understandings, or corrupting their hearts.

P. R. E. F. A. C. E.

THIS LIBRARY is not like the English Book of
Common Prayer, a translation of the Roman
Catholic Missal;—it is not, like the translations
and amendments of that translation, intended to
form a text for the discomfiture of the author;
—it is a specimen of Public Service, in which
Philosophers might join, without winking their
understanding, or compromising their hearts.

FIRST SERVICE.

MINISTER, OR READER.

POWERFUL Ruler of the Universe! whatever thou art—whether Nature necessarily existing; or the animating spirit of mortals,—we adore Thee, who by impenetrable methods conductest all things to Thy purposes.

READER, *joined by the Congregation.*

Thou hast the universe for Thy temple: Thy homage, is the meditation of wisdom; and Thy incense, a pure and virtuous heart.

READER.

Nothing we are capable of conceiving, approaches Thy nature; which has neither form nor essence, comprehensible by us. Universal Principle of all existence; and the centre in which all things terminate! Source of life and death; of motion or

of rest! The heavens, the earth, and the sea, are preserved by Thee; but the creation, or destruction of worlds, seems indifferent to Thy happiness!

PEOPLE, *joining the Minister.*

By the visible things of this world; and their admirable order, we conceive there is a cause of them; that cause we call God: but we have no idea, or image of him, in our minds.

READER.

Man is the most excellent of all objects in our knowledge; a machine reflecting on his own motions. Whether the general principle actuating Nature, be analogous to that of man, we cannot know: we must judge of the picture, without hoping to know the artist.

In the frail composition of mortals, there is no principle implanted, either of consciousness or sensation, which is not equally diffused through the beautiful and expanded system of nature; or which is not regulated by some general or uniform cause. This is the object of universal

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fal adoration; and this is infinitely degraded by all similitude with chance, necessity, or the random concourse of matter. It is this universal principle, which combines the elements of which we are composed; develops our powers; enables us to chuse objects which are agreeable, or to avoid those which are painful; conducts us to our dissolution; and subjects us to that law, from which nothing can be exempted.

PEOPLE.

In him, we live and move, and have our being.

READER.

Every thing existing, seems to be the consequence of properties in nature; mingling or changing its forms, producing good and evil, order and disorder. We are blind, when we imagine blind causes; we are ignorant of the regulating power of Nature, when we attribute them to necessity or chance; we are not better informed, when we refer them to intelligence analogous to the nature of man:

we

we invent words, when not acquainted with things; and believe ourselves wise, when we obscure ideas we cannot analyze or define. We renounce all mysterious incomprehensible language, concerning matter acting blindly, the necessity of essences, or the divinity of chance. We do not consider nature, or the God of nature, as having the organs or the intelligence of man; but as the centre, origin, and cause of all perceptions, all ideas, all intuition, all thoughts, all plans, and all actions.

We will not persist in defining thy nature, or complimenting thy excellencies, O ineffable and universal cause: it involves us in a confusion of embarrassing ideas, which is insupportable. To compose Thee of the different parts of nature, is to involve ourselves in the difficulty of a limited universe; or of infinity consisting of parts. To suppose Thee an individual, is separating Thee from the universe, and destroying Thy infinity. To paint, by our imaginations, an idea of an infinite Being, is impossible: yet, to doubt the existence

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tence of one uniform, universal cause, which every step we take in the path of knowledge indisputably proves, is to doubt the strongest accumulation of evidence, which our minds are capable of receiving. Whatever we aver, is in language formed on our immediate necessities; whatever we imagine, as to the manner of thy existence, by means of powers limited to our present wants, is so far from leading us to the truth, that it often makes us lose every idea of Thee. It is not necessary our imaginations should comprehend Thee, as they do not comprehend our own natures.

RESPONSE.

It is sufficient, that the evidence of thy existence, be as certain and inexplicable as our own.

READER.

In this conviction, we consider Thee with affections; which are nothing in regard to Thee; but important to ourselves. They banish fear, inquietude, and distrust; they extinguish inhuman zeal, and those
sentiments

sentiments of partiality or hatred, which accompany all superstitions: they purify that philosophic and religious enthusiasm, incident to all good men who contemplate the works of nature; and they furnish them with piety every way worthy a reasonable mind.

In ascribing attributes to Thee, O ineffable, incomprehensible Being, all language must fail. The idea of a cause of all things; of a Being comprizing all possible perfections in an infinite degree—is an abyss so vast, so unfathomable; its immensity overwhelms; and all our faculties are annihilated.

Superior to all things; involving all things, God cannot do any thing for glory!

In the dispositions of nature, regarding similar classes of being, there is an uniformity analogous to equity; but nothing like mutual obligation: we would do well, therefore, neither to adore, or to arraign, the equity of Divine Providence.

The

The term Goodness, most honourable to human character, is inadequate to our idea of that disposition of nature, which produces all its happiness. Thy existence, which we understand not, is the foundation of ours, which is incomprehensible. In regarding that existence; in studying its preservation by the regulations of reason, we obey Thee; we yield to the impulse of sentiments with which Thou hast inspired us; and we find our happiness in ourselves, in pursuing the bias or direction of that modification Thou hast given us.

Wisdom, Justice, Mercy, Patience, are human virtues; and the application to Thee is absurd. In thus retailing Thy excellencies, we destroy every idea of Thy infinity; and reduce Thee into the Magistrate of a limited empire.

Our ideas, even of Supreme Power deliberately exercised, are feeble or disproportionate. All action, all causes, are essential to Thy nature; and as necessarily supposed as Thy existence.

In

In endeavoring to apply to Thee, any of the qualities or virtues of men, we are impeded by inviolable obstacles. Every effect differs from its cause, in the very circumstances which constitute an effect. We are thy creatures; effects from Thee; and may have no qualities in common with our Creator. Our industry; our knowledge; our wisdom convince us, He is so much above all the ideas or images we can form, that our very efforts to define and represent him, often cloud or embarrass our understandings.

It is our business, however, to instruct ourselves in all the orders of beauty, in all the utility of particular forms. We gradually rise to general causes; with hearts more expanded, and minds more comprehensive, we perpetually seek that cause which actuates the universe.

PEOPLE.

We cannot, by searching, find out God.

READER.

READER.

It is to man, to society, to our country, our talents are important, and our virtues should be directed. If we perceive not the moral ties, which bind man to an insect, how shall we speak of those which bind us to the Deity; before whom we find ourselves annihilated, when we glance our thoughts at his being or perfections.

While the pleasures of novelty, beauty, or grandeur, are excited by the contemplation of Nature, the cause cannot be imperfectly considered without emotion. When the sun rises; dispels the morning clouds; or gilds the earth with its rays, all sensible beings experience sentiments of satisfaction: the birds sing; the cattle low; and man, feeling his existence a blessing, corresponds with the general harmony; redoubles his satisfaction, by reflecting on that universal Power which renews his daily joy.

Awful objects are sublime, and dilate the soul with pleasure. This is the enthusiasm

thusiasm of devotion. Details of unconnected facts in nature, or the random operations of blind fatality, are clouded with cold and melancholy. But when the slightest analogies of design are pointed out, they become interesting; the heart is warmed by admiration; and the pursuit gratifies the best feelings of the mind.

Let us guard ourselves in this perilous situation. We are approaching the confines of superstition. Let us beware, of flattering a cause, which acts by fixed principles, and of which nothing can alter the effects: implore not a Power, which, by the discord of elements, and the incessant production or dissolution of forms, maintains the harmony and stability of the world: and expect not, the plan of Nature, or the properties of beings, should be changed on our applications: fire will burn, or disease consume us; and the most impetuous cries will not prevent the misery of our country, if governed by weakness or despotism.

PEOPLE.

PEOPLE.

To oppose, or correct the designs of Nature, is folly; to regulate, or wish to change them, is madness!

READER.

Above all things, let us avoid the delusions of fanaticism. As it is absurd to deny the existence of God; because that existence may be incomprehensible; it is folly and extravagance to ascribe qualities to him, which exist only in our own nature; or to tremble before an image, the parts of which our fancies have arbitrarily combined. The most odious divinities have been created by ignorance or imposture: credulity has cherished them; they are revered from habit; and tyranny supports their interests, because tyranny can profit only by the folly or misery of mankind. Our imaginations wander, when we quit experience. Indolence has recourse to example or authority, to avoid action or reflection; and we attempt to remedy our ignorance, by adopting words that have no meaning. There can be no
virtue,

virtue, where God is the enemy of virtue, the tyrant of the human race; where he violates those laws of nature, of which he is supposed the author. Let us soar above the thick atmosphere of falsehood, mystery, and contradiction.— Let us carefully avoid those men, who are associated into classes or professions, to profit by our errors, to corrupt, enslave, to render us vicious and miserable. Imagination, enthusiasm, habit, prepossession, authority, and various species of tyrannic force, are the substitutes of knowledge, reflection, reason; and oblige men to profess opinions deemed necessary to keep depraved societies in order. We renounce the science of religious chimeras, so profitable to its professors; so fatal to their fellow-citizens. Tyrants of the earth; the most wicked, the most detestable of men, are the models on which the character of the Deity has been generally formed; and the most oppressive government, the symbol of the Divine Administration. It is to a capricious despot;

pot; to a malignant genius; to a formidable demon; the offspring of ignorance or calamity—that men commonly pay their servile and degrading homage. We will not persist, in imagining the Deity iniquitous or cruel; laying snares for his offspring, and punishing them for falling.

READER, *joined by the Congregation.*

Despotic government has not produced a tyrant; human nature has not generated a monster, so cruel, so revengful, so wicked, as the odious phantom, to which superstition is devoted!

END OF THE FIRST SERVICE.

SECOND

SECOND SERVICE.

READER.

WE are assembled, solemnly to recognize sentiments, which may induce us to avoid the evils of superstition, and guard against the apathy of the votaries of chance. Things are not, to one another, disunited or independent; there seems to be coherence in the whole; and we infer order, proportion, or something more analogous to design than to chance. All things are related; branches to trees; trees to earth, water, and air, which yield their nutriment: seeds, fruits, and leaves, to the animals which feed on them: animals to one another, and to the elements in which they exist; wings fitting them for the air, fins for the sea, and feet for the earth. All these relations take place, where we have knowledge; where we have none, we can form no judgment: and we must submit to the restraints of incapacity

capacity and ignorance. We should exhibit ourselves vain and conceited idiots, were we to arraign the universe, where we are as moths or atoms; and where the small or trifling parts we comprehend, are excellent and admirable: or to confine all ideas of order and perfection to ourselves, while we deny it to that Nature, or principle of Nature, which gave us being.

RESPONSE.

The last stage of presumptuous ignorance, is that of beings affecting wisdom, to correct the wisdom by which they were formed.

READER.

We see an order, analogous to intelligent disposition, in the constituent parts of the system we inhabit; in a combined series of causes and effects, producing the active existence or support of the whole. All things are subject to the laws of this order; and all beings are obliged to answer its general ends. But the system is sometimes alarmed! Comets, in pursuing
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their courses, disturb its tranquillity, or excite terror in the people, to whom all things have wonders. Our own seasons seem displaced; the elements dispute the dominion of the world; the sea passeth its limits; the solid earth is shaken; the mountains blaze; sterility desolates the plains; or pestilence sweeps off animals and men. Affrighted mortals lift up their hands to some imagined cause of the apparent disorder; while Nature is incapable of admitting the slightest deviation from her laws, which alter or dissolve all things at proper times, to assume new arrangements and new forms.

The Congregation joining the READER.

The cause of these alterations, we may never be able to define, in languages formed on the wants or purposes of mortals: our abilities may not be competent to the undertaking: but we can avoid the presumption of referring them to such absurdities as absolute necessity, blind fate, or Nature operating by chance.

READER.

READER.

Our efforts will ever be vain; though often commendable; to penetrate the sanctuary of Nature. Matter, of which all things around us is formed, is incomprehensible; we cannot define, with clearness, its mode of affecting us. How shall we speak of Nature, or of Nature's God! Every thing tends to convince us, we should not, for we cannot seek the Deity out of nature. Every thing to us is impossible, which is not produced by its laws. Our ideas of matter or its forms, are imperfect or defective—how then shall we presume, on the conclusions of our understandings, concerning the source of all elements, all principles, all properties, all modes of existence and action!

The rocks which balance the earth; the flowers that decorate its surface; the beings who are born, brought to maturity, and perish on it;—are all implied in that sublime idea, which no language is formed to express. We see no-

thing, we know nothing, but material beings, and the laws by which they act.

The READER, joined by the People.

The general principle, in which all action, all intelligence, all pleasure, all pain, all good, all evil, are involved, we always misrepresent, when we attempt to describe; and we may be said to degrade, even by affixing him names!

READER.

All the world is one perpetual scene of transmigration: an animal no sooner quits one form than it assumes another; nature is in perpetual youth. Every being is convertible into every thing; all is reducible to one: the universe, and the wonderful principle that actuates it, are always the same. It is our business to learn the laws of that great whole, of which we feel the influence; to contemplate its energy; or to apply real discoveries to our real interest and happiness. When ignorant of its combinations, properties, or forces, the universe is a scene of illusions. We will shake off that stupid
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indolence, which wears the form of respect for antiquity, or the institutions of our fathers; and have recourse to bold, laborious experiments, which alone can force out the secrets of Nature. By accurate and attentive researches, we will endeavor to trace all particular chains of causes, into a general principle, a central power in Nature; to which all powers, all essences, all energies are subject; which regulates the movements of all beings; and, in different methods, induces their concurrence in its general plan or purpose; which is the life, action, and preservation of the whole, by the perpetual changes or revolutions of its parts.

M A N.

WE are lost, when we attempt to imagine, the indefinite succession of combinations, which take place in the universe. —Suns may be extinguished; planets blown away as dust in the incomprehensible regions of space: other suns and

other planets be formed, and describe their revolutions. Man! a small portion of this earth! a point in the universe almost imperceptible!—shall man deem the whole made for him? or that he is the confidant and sovereign of Nature? the insect of a day, shall he conceive himself immortal?—while all nature is changing, while nothing retains a permanent form, shall he plead exemption from the inviolable law?—and while amusing himself with vain opinions, shall he remain the only creature that anticipates his fate, with horror and regret?

Let us relinquish the absurdity of making man the centre of the universe. Let us not rest our sentiments and manners, on contradictory opinions, abstract speculations, absurd or discordant oracles; but on principles deduced from Nature, founded on experience and reason. Let the involved or combined interests of individuals and societies, furnish the maxims of our morality; as they never vary
with

with the caprices of imagination, or the impulses of irregular passion.

The People joining the MINISTER.

It is not given us to know first principles ; not even our own origin : but it is given us to have reason and virtue ; and in all things beyond them, to confess our ignorance.

READER.

Whence are we ? Whether produced from eternity ? Whether the transient effects of natural causes ? Whether to continue in succession for ever ? Or to give place to new species of being ?—all is beyond our knowledge !—The relation of things to us, as we now exist, either as individuals, or members of society, is all we can comprehend ; all that is necessary to our happiness.

CONFESSION.

IF we have been defective in our conduct, we have sinned against the principles of our existence ; against the rules of society ;

ciety; against ourselves, in foregoing the most desirable advantages.

It is impossible we should resist the will of God; or, that the Author of all beings, should have enemies of his own forming.

Let us avoid the inconveniences of superstition, the principal of which is the habit of committing offences; and actually becoming, by constantly confessing ourselves, criminal. Let us not be familiar with vices, in the hope of remedying them by repentance; let not the habit of considering, or confessing ourselves unfaithful to God, dispose us to become unjust and dishonorable to men!

RESPONSE.

Amen.

P R A Y E R.

THE homage of man, should be on the altar of virtue. It would be folly to express our wishes or prayers, in regard to events, which are the effects of universal and immutable arrangements; as it would

would be, that water may not moisten, or that fire may not burn.

— We are invited by Nature incessantly to augment the sum of our happiness; not to humble or detest ourselves; not to sacrifice, to any chimerical idol, the soft and endearing affections of our hearts.

We will not offer up to Heaven, vows, sacrifices, or oblations, to escape misfortunes, which are the consequences of our own negligence and ignorance; the folly of our institutions, customs, or opinions; the absurdity of our laws; and the iniquity of our religions. We will not bow before a tyrant, be his imagined abode in heaven or in earth. Despotism depraves, in order to enslave us: ignorance and servitude render us wicked and wretched. Wearied with idle fables, impenetrable mysteries, or puerile ceremonies, we fix our thoughts on intelligible objects, sensible truths, and useful knowledge.

We are ashamed of that frenzy, which, to prevent the smallest evil to ourselves, has tempted us to ask, that the eternal

chain of things may be broken, or induced us to hate and torment each other for unintelligible opinions.— We despise that vanity, or selfishness, which would lead us, for the good or evil that may affect ourselves, to impute favor or malice to the Power actuating the universe; or to imagine our cries and vows can interrupt an universal force acting by universal laws. We submit to our lot: we seek, in Nature, remedies provided for the ills she occasions; salutary productions to remove our diseases; experience and truth to counteract our errors. She is impartial to all her productions; all things are subject to her laws; it must be by the suspension of those laws, not by our sufferings, that her harmony would be interrupted, or disorder could take place.

Let us no longer affect to despise realities, while we meditate on chimeras; or neglect experience to be occupied by conjectures, prayers, or wishes: let us cultivate reason; and before we attempt
to

to ascertain the lot of mortals, in future regions, let us render them happy in their present abode.

RESPONSE.

Amen.

TRUTH.

OVER every atom of the human frame, we find diffused a sense of pleasure or abhorrence of pain. Every movement we make discovers, or confirms, the fundamental principle of virtue, that pleasure is annexed to actions tending to our preservation and utility; pain to the contrary. Among the objects affecting us, we chuse, we add, we multiply, we divide; until the business is complicated, and an error in the process confounds us. Instead of deploring our misfortune with unmanly despair; instead of unavailing confessions: instead of committing ourselves to others who may deceive us, or praying to Heaven to do, what can be done only by ourselves; we must recur to the elements

ments of this noble science, and correct the error in its principles. If we have no capacity, or have no leisure for these deductions; let us not submit our understandings to the authority of others; a state of degradation much below any species of ignorance: as the belief of mathematical truths are not enjoined on those who do not understand them; the truths of morality, or religion, are enjoined on those only who comprehend them.

In all the paths of knowledge, we find these general marks to direct us—truth is simple, error complicate; the voice of truth is clear or intelligible, that of error ambiguous, enigmatical, mysterious; the road pointed out by truth, is direct, open, and pleasant, while that of imposture is oblique, shadowy, and perplexing.

V I R T U E.

DAUGHTER of reason, of experience,
of Nature! O raise us above the noxious
atmosphere of falsehood, mystery, and
con-

contradiction ! We do not act from mere love or hatred, hope or fear ; but from a spirit of order, and the conclusions of the understanding. The superstitious is good, when he is so, merely from passion ; and passions are not permanent. In proportion as our reason is cultivated, our minds are removed from disorder. Lively but balanced passions, lead us to pleasures, never to crimes. We are induced, by unavoidable reflection, as well as by irresistible passions, to propose more pleasure by living with each other, cultivating mutual confidence or love, and acquit-ourselves of the duties of friendship or gratitude, than by any confined or selfish gratifications. While we learn to esteem ourselves in proportion to our talents and virtues ; and never suffer concealed vices or secret passions, to debase us in our own eyes ; let us serve and honor human society by probity or attention to its duties ; and by the utmost caution avoid the real dishonor of being useless or burthensome members.

Nature,

Nature, replete with intelligence, sentiment, and action, is continually exhibiting events astonishing to man, who remains but a moment to consider them; and has neither time nor means to penetrate their causes. It is our first concern, to expel all extravagant ideas of ourselves or our destination; to have recourse to intellectual industry; to keep scrupulously to the path of experience, which alone can direct the means to satisfy our desires, and remove or diminish the evils we endure.

RESPONSE.

Our good and evil, are not to be sought at the thresholds of sanctuaries; but in the recesses of the mind.

C A N D O R.

WHILE others attend to the surface of nature, or analyze its common elements—let us fix our eyes on its most beautiful productions, the minds, characters, and works of those exalted men,
who

who have lived in every age. We shall thus acquire the art of thinking justly and acting nobly. We regret the fates of all those benefactors of the world, who have been ill-treated in it ; and we deeply feel the reproach or dishonor it casts on the human race. We would expiate this most odious species of ingratitude, by an indulgent attention to all great and good men, even in their errors and failings ; and do every thing in our power to mark with infamy that fanaticism, whether civil or religious, which leads men to persecute virtue or merit, in persecuting those who combat their prejudices. That order of men, among whom an unrestrained enquiry prevails ; who think on all subjects ; is the noblest, the best in all communities : and evils always arise from the great who oppress, or the people who are oppressed.

If we must be amused with phantoms, let us allow the same privilege to others ; and while we impress our minds with the absolute necessity, that men should be peaceable,

peaceable, just, and beneficent; let us ever recollect, that the field of opinion has no inclosures; and that nothing can be more unimportant than our manner of thinking on subjects inaccessible to reason.

The READER, joined by the Congregation.

All wise; all important considerations, lead us to candor, indulgence, toleration, and humanity.



FINIS.

